

# A SCHOOL ECONOMIC HISTORY OF ENGLAND

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I. FROM THE CONQUEST TO THE MIDDLE OF  
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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## P R E F A C E

MY object in writing this little book is to supply what I believe to be a need for a school text-book in economic history. It is hoped that it will be useful to the Upper Forms of our Secondary Schools, to students in Training Colleges, and to teachers in our new Continuation Schools. There are signs that teachers are anxious to replace a great deal of the political history now taught, by a study of the life and business of the common people, but that they find it difficult to obtain books suitable for their purpose. Several books on social history have appeared, but most of them are written for lower and middle school children. On the other hand, the standard economic histories are too full for any but adult students. This book aims at something between.

No pretension is made to an extended study of the original sources. The matter of the book is based on the various standard histories already written and on special monographs on different subjects. Where controversial points occur, I have done my best either to state the case of both sides clearly, as in the early history of the Manor, or to select what seems to me the more likely theory on the basis of the evidence offered by the disputants, as in the story of sixteenth-century enclosures.

Obviously for a book based so much on the work of others complete acknowledgement of help is impossible. No one who is working in this field can fail to express his indebtedness to the histories of Professor Ashley, of the late Archdeacon Cunningham, and of Mr. E. Lipson, and all the writers mentioned in the list

of books at the end have, in varying degrees, been drawn upon from time to time. Most of the information as to the position of women at different periods has been supplied to me from the as yet unpublished researches of Miss A. B. Dawson, M.Litt. (Dunelm.), to whom, and to Miss M. M. Bone, B.A. (London), my thanks are due for constant encouragement as well as for help in checking and revising the manuscript.

By the illustrations I have sought to give pictures of the chief phases of economic development, drawn as far as possible from original sources. If they are not all from English sources (and those who have worked over the field will realize how many of the early woodcuts which illustrate English books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were themselves imported from abroad) I have been careful to exclude those of which the detail is obviously foreign or is not typical of the civilization of Western Europe of the time.

CHARLOTTE M. WATERS.



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## INTRODUCTION

ECONOMIC HISTORY is that special branch of the story of man that deals with his means of livelihood, how he produces food, clothing and shelter, and how he distributes them when produced. The word comes from two Greek words, *oikos* house, and *nomos* law, and economics is the science of housekeeping. Economic History is the story of man's housekeeping from the simple days of the cave-man, who killed his food and ate it raw, wrapped himself in the skins of the slain and lived in caves which he did not build, right up to the present time, when each one of us requires the help of thousands of his fellows to provide him with food, clothing and shelter for a single day. The questions which the economic history of any nation sets out to answer are roughly these: How did these people feed, clothe, and shelter themselves? Who among them shared in the production? who in the distribution? How far did they arrange for both production and distribution and how far did they leave it to chance? What effect did their systems, or lack of systems, at different times have on their welfare and happiness? How far did they plan consciously for certain results? How far did they act blindly, seeing only the need of the moment? Occasionally we may ask, were they wise or unwise, or whether we now can learn from their mistakes?

Now this aspect of our English story is rather different from that we find in our political and constitutional histories. For one thing it will consist of much less definite events; most of it will be the tale of slow changes working gradually over long periods of time; instead of battles and the deaths of kings, instead of Magna Carta, the Reformation or the Revolution, we shall talk of the Growth of the Manor or the Decay of Villeinage, both of which took centuries, or of the Expansion of Trade and the Rise of Capitalism, neither of them yet complete. But

always we shall be finding answers to the same question, how men and women produced and distributed material wealth? We shall often find that those very definite political and constitutional events, those wars and laws and methods of government, have their roots in the soil of our economic story, and that before we can understand them we must understand the nation's housekeeping. For it is just as important to know how a nation earns its living if we are to understand its other acts, even its art and literature, as it is to know the same of a man, if we are to grasp his whole personality and the true significance of his work.

The plan in what follows is to take pictures of our nation at intervals of about 200 years, noting the changes and trying to see what has brought them about. At each stopping place we take either three or four pictures, one of rural England, one of the towns, and one of the government; this last only from the point of view of the national housekeeping, politics and law being left to other history books. In some periods we add a picture of overseas trade, and once one of the mediæval church. We have begun in the eleventh century because Britain was conquered then for the last time, and since then our records form a continuous chain of ever-increasing strength. At that time was established a definite system which we can watch expand, decay and die out during five centuries, leaving relics that even now modify our lives. With the passing of the Middle Ages and the manorial system, modern economic history begins in the sixteenth century. Its central factor is competition, a struggle of each class in turn to get more than its equal share in the distribution of wealth, and a fight among the individuals within the class to do the same thing for themselves. This later story is one of rapid change, of the bursting of all fetters on individual effort till it culminates in the licence of the nineteenth century, when each man fought for his own hand. We start in the eleventh century in which no man is free to do that which he will with his own, and we end in the nineteenth with his almost absolute power to use it as he pleases.

There is another story, too, for we start with a people almost entirely ignorant of trade, made up of tiny self-sufficing communities, and we end with an island empire, the greatest trading community that history has known, no single portion of which can support itself alone, even for a short time.

At first you may find this sort of history difficult ; it has new terms and, at the beginning, there seems no end to these ; it lacks the nice definitions of great names, great battles, great laws, even of fixed dates. But if you will call on your imagination, if you will try to see the individual men and women at work in field, shop and factory, if you will think yourself back into the life described, whether as a great lord in his castle with ample food, fine robes, much dirt and little pocket money, or as a hardworking villen, very much of a slave, yet capable of standing for his rights, living like a pig but fighting and working like a man, I think you will find this side of our nation's story as fascinating and even as romantic as all our wars and pageants and great adventures. Life was quite as romantic to an Elizabethan apprentice as to Drake or Raleigh, the story of the Industrial Revolution is as tragic a mixture of enterprise and misery, idealism and utter selfishness, as that of the Crusades. Romance is not merely a gaudy cloak and a dashing mien, not even only gallant adventure or daring fight ; there is romance in golden fields of corn ; in perilous journeys by sea and land ; in finding new worlds, not only across the seas, but in fresh arts for human skill ; in discovering new means of controlling the forces of nature ; in winning new lands by draining bogs instead of by killing men. In all that story of man's achievement with hand and brain

'By dock and deep and mine and mill  
The Boy-god reckless laboured still!'





## PART I

### HOW MEN LIVED IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

#### I. The Village

**Domesday Book.** 'At midwinter in the year 1085 William the Conqueror wore his crown at Gloucester and there he had deep speech with his wise men.' It was nearly twenty years since Senlac had given to the Duke of Normandy and his following of barons, brigands and landless adventurers, the rich country, which, successively the prey of Roman, Saxon and Dane, had then changed hands for the last time. Now William and his wise men decided that the time had come to take stock of the booty. So he sent through all England his commissioners to every shire and hundred with orders to describe the kingdom on which he had entered. They went, and they called together men from every district and every village and wrote down what they learnt. Then clerks at head-quarters took the reports and rearranged them so that the king might know, not only what land there was and what taxes it could pay, but who was responsible for the land to him, for according to Norman ideas all land must be held 'of ' somebody, and finally of the king. Thus was made Domesday Book, as it came to be called, the first great survey of England, on which we depend mainly for our knowledge of the economics of the early Middle Ages.

Let us see exactly what the commissioners had to do. Here is one set of instructions: 'The King's barons inquired by oath of the sheriff of the shire and of all the barons and of their Frenchmen and of the whole hundred, the priest, reeve, and six villani of every vill, how the mansio is called, who held it in the time of King Edward, who holds it now, how many hides, how

many plough teams on the demesne, how many plough teams of the men, how many villani, how many cotarii, how many servi, how many liberi homines, how many sochemanni, how much wood, how much meadow, how much pasture, how many mills, how many fisheries, how much has been taken away therefrom, how much added thereto, and how much there is now, how much each liber homo and sochemannus had and has : all this thrice over, to wit as regards the time of King Edward, the time when King William gave it, and the present time, and whether more can be had thence than is had now' These were the directions ; let us take a look at the final report. This is what

**R** **TERRA REGIS.**  
 go **Villa ten** **Villanos** in dñio. Rex. l. tenent.  
 lbi. xx. hidas. 7 pa. e. In dñio. e. una car. 7 xxii. uilli  
 7 ii. bord. cū. x. car. lbi. un' seruus. 7 piscaria de. vi. solid. 7 viii.  
 denar. 7 xl. de pa. Silva. de. l. port. de pascua. 7 alia filia  
 milla. e. in defensa. 7 adhuc sunt in villa. c. hage. v. mii. Ex h  
 sunt xxvi. que de abio. 7 de alio. p. cum. xxx. solidi.

## SPECIMEN OF DOMESDAY BOOK.

we find of the manor of Limenesfeld in Surrey : ' In demesne there are 5 teams and there are 25 villani and 6 bordarii with 14 teams. There is one mill of 2 shillings and one fishery and one church and 4 acres of meadow, and wood for 150 pannage pigs, and 2 stone quarries of 2 shillings and 2 nests of hawks in the wood and 10 servi'; or, if you prefer the original Latin, this of Fulham in Middlesex : ' In eadem villa tenent canonici S. Pauli de rege v hidas pro uno manerio. Terra est v carucis. Ad dominium pertinent iii hidae, et ibi sunt ii carucae. Villani ii carucas et tercia potest fieri. Ibi viii villani quisque de virgata, et vii villani quisque de dimidia virgata, et vii bordarii quisque de v acris.' Now what does all this mean, this talk of villani and bordarii, of demesne and mansio ? It bears little resemblance to such a survey if

taken nowadays. What will a close study of Domesday Book, helped by such records as we have of earlier and later times, show us ?

**England a Land of Villages.** Something like this. In the eleventh century England was a land of 'vills'. A vill could be of more than one kind. It might be a village of some size, perhaps from 20 to 40 households, though 100 households are not unknown, and these nucleated villages had a special way of living that will be described in the next paragraph. But a vill could also be made up of several tiny hamlets of three or four households, or even of scattered homesteads, much more like our modern farms. The first kind is commonest in the east, midlands, and south, the two others become more frequent as we go west. Geography has something to do with it, though not all ; thus we find the scattered homesteads in the dales of Derbyshire, though other reasons would make us expect villages.

**A typical Village of the South and Midlands.** Could we re-visit an eleventh-century village of the south or middle of England, we should find something very unfamiliar. On either side of an irregular roadway would be cottages, whose appearance would suggest pig-styes or at least cattle-sheds, where in winter human beings and pigs and poultry lived and slept in happy ignorance of the laws of hygiene ; each of these cottages would be surrounded by a piece of land called a 'toft'. There would be a church, which was also the parish hall, where meetings took place and public business was done ; and a parsonage little or no better than the houses of the villagers. We should see a mill where the miller, who was usually credited with getting rich by cheating, lived better and warmer, but hardly cleaner, than his fellows, and a few huts even poorer and frailer than the majority, inhabited by men who, having little or no property, were slaves or little above them. Lastly, a little apart from the main group, we should find a larger building, built possibly of stone, with barns and storehouses and outlying sheds, obviously the property of some superior. This was the Hall where the Lord of the Manor lived from time to time or, if he were not a very great lord, always.

How did such a village live? If we walked through the street we should presently come to large fields obviously cultivated,



A BALK OR DIVIDING STRIP, showing the Meerstone,  
Upton St. Leonards.

but looking very different from fields nowadays. There were no hedges round these fields, only at certain times of the year some temporary fencing. There would be either two or three very large fields and one of the three, in alternation, would be lying fallow, that is, it would be uncultivated and covered with

rough growth. The field, or fields, that were cultivated would look strange. They would be divided, not by hedges, but by narrow lengths of turf called balks, into strips, roughly a furlong long and 2 or 4 poles (or rods) wide. A furlong (220 yards) is really a 'furrow long', the straight distance before the plough turns and rests to let the oxen breathe. The pole varied, but



THE LYNCHES AT UPION ST. LEONARDS, looking north-east.

was usually  $5\frac{1}{2}$  yards long, and a breadth of four of these gave an acre, the amount one team of oxen could usually plough in a day ending at noon. Sometimes when the strips lay on a hill slope the balks were called *lynches*. On the slope the plough turned the soil downhill and in time the sloping strips became flat terraces. The lynchies were then steep banks, frequently covered with bushes. Each of these strips belonged to one of the villagers, and he would possess either fifteen or thirty of them scattered about all over the fields, no two being together. What-

ever number he held would be evenly divided among the two or three fields. A holding of thirty acre strips was usually called a virgate, and the man who owned it was called a villanus (villein). How he cultivated it we shall see later.

Most of the men of the village were villani, but there were others both poorer and richer. Below the villani were the bordarii (bordars) and the cotarii (cotters). The bordars sometimes held strips in the common fields, the cotters never; the main property of both was some 3 to 5 acres near their cottages. Above the villeins were free men and socmen, and finally the lord. The free men and the socmen held land among the strips and lived much as the villeins as far as their own land was concerned, but their relation to their 'lord' was different. How did the lord live? He usually had a good deal of land in the village, it might be strips among the others, or it might be enclosed land lying round the Hall like a modern home farm, but wherever it lay it was called the lord's 'demesne'. How did he cultivate it? Not with his own labour and that of his family, as the villeins and many of the socmen and freemen did. Did he employ labourers as a modern landowner would? Not exactly in the same way. The villeins, bordars, and cotters held their land by a *labour rent*. In return for it they had to work for the lord on *his* land, so many days a week (called week-work) and for so many days extra at special times like harvest (called boon-work). Bordars and cotters did the same. The freemen and the socmen did not do week-work, though occasionally we find men called socmen doing it, but they too helped the lord in boon-work. Last of all there was a certain number of slaves who worked for the lord and were his absolutely.

**Tenure of the Land.** Before we inquire how the land was worked and what sort of profit was made out of it, we ought to get some idea of the rights each of these classes had in it, because it makes a good deal of difference in a country, who owns the land and what he can do with it. Now Domesday Book shows us many different kinds of tenures and we have a shrewd suspicion that it hides behind its Latin names a still greater variety. The Normans were used to a system by which everybody held

land 'de' somebody else, and they found in England something very like, often exactly like, what they were used to. But they also found many cases that did not fit in at all with this Norman custom and sometimes they mention it, but frequently there is little doubt they twisted it round and labelled it with the terms they knew, which were often a very bad fit. But in a great many cases it would be correct to say that the Norman theory was true in fact, if not in name. A villein held his land 'of' his lord and therefore in a sense it was his lord's land, and the villein could neither sell nor give it away; on the other hand, it is doubtful if the lord could eject him as long as he performed his services. The villein's land was hereditary, and yet the heir had to secure his lord's consent to his succession and to pay a fine on getting it. In fact the villein's legal rights were vague, but custom secured him a very real interest in his holding and economic factors combined to tie him to it. The lord wanted to keep him because of his labour on the demesne, the villein had no desire, as yet, to leave the land which was his only means of subsistence. The holdings of freemen and socmen were in a sense also held 'of' the lord; they formed part of the organization which, as a whole, was called the Manor, but the freemen could leave or sell their land and it passed to the heir without leave or licence from the lord. The position of socmen varied; sometimes they seem as free as the *liberi homines*, sometimes they are little better off than the villani. Probably in the eleventh century their exact position was uncertain; we shall see in the thirteenth century, after the lawyers had got to work, what happened to it. One of the differences between the freeman and the villein is that the former is fold-worthy, i.e. he has the right to fold his sheep where he will. The villein was obliged to fold his in the lord's demesne. The value of this to the lord was great, as the manure of sheep was the chief available enrichment of the soil. The right, therefore, to use his own sheep on his own land was greatly treasured by freeman and socman, and was frequently a test of his status. A village, such as the above, bears a strong resemblance to the very definite organization

known as the manor, which will be described in Part II, dealing with the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and indeed Domesday Book divides all England into 'manors', and a great many of them appear in the above form.

**Various sorts of Villages.** But the villein holding his land by labour services from a lord, with labourers and slaves below him and a few freemen above and partially outside the manor, is not the only type we find.

(i) In the eastern counties, where the Danish immigration was but some two centuries old, we find groups of freemen holding villages of their own. Also where the manorial organization is present, with lord, demesne and villeins, we find freemen standing outside it, for 'they could take their land to whom they would', i.e. they had a lord to whom they had 'commended' themselves, but they could change him if they pleased. As we go westward the number of freemen and socmen decreases.

(ii) On the other hand, we find a manor that was all demesne, i.e. a mere lord's estate cultivated by unfree labourers.

(iii) The manorial organization of a lot of scattered hamlets or small farms must have been loose, and produce-rents often took the place of labour-rent. It would not pay, even if it were possible, to cultivate an estate by labourers who had to walk miles to get to their work.

But while Domesday Book shows us this great variety of villages, though it also shows us how they were tending to take on one special form, which reaches its perfection about a century later, it does show us a common basis and resemblance. Leaving therefore for the time the legal questions that surround the status of the villein, the socman, and the slave, let us look merely at the economic situation.

**The Isolation of the Village.** The first contrast to our own times that strikes us is that the village was self-sufficing. It produced nearly all it wanted. In those fields divided into strips was growing the corn needful for food and drink; on them in the autumn and on the waste land in the summer pastured the oxen that drew the plough, and the sheep that supplied the wool



for clothing, while for nine months in the year the woods and waste harboured the pig, that general utility animal, whose flesh formed the principal food and whose hide and bristles and fat were all valuable. Wood came from the woods and waste commons round the village, the right to use which went with the villein's strips in the field. Just a few things were needed from outside, iron for the blacksmith to turn into horse-shoes, ploughshares, sickles and knives, salt to keep the meat through the long winter months, and mill-stones to grind the corn. Even the smallest village nowadays has its grocer's shop, but in William's day the markets were few and far between and roads impassable for six months of the year. Thus the villagers had to feed and clothe themselves out of the produce of their land, though they did not know a great deal about ways of doing it.

#### **Eleventh-century Farming.**

Since the eighteenth century, farmers have learnt how to make the land produce more, by a rotation of crops so arranged that each crop uses up different things from the soil in turn and so leaves time for each constituent of the soil to recover itself. Especially useful for this purpose are crops of roots, like turnips. Our ancestors of the eleventh century knew little of this beyond the fact that it did not pay to grow wheat on the same ground two years following. So they cultivated the land on what is known as the three-field system, or often on the two-field. On this plan the arable land was divided into three fields: one was sown with wheat or rye, one with barley or oats or peas and beans, and the third was left fallow. Next year the wheat-field would have barley, the



A FORGE

barley one be left fallow, and the fallow one ploughed and sown with wheat.

1st year.	2nd year.	3rd year.
I. Wheat.	Barley.	Fallow.
II. Barley.	Fallow.	Wheat.
III. Fallow.	Wheat.	Barley.

On a two-field system half the land would be left fallow and the other half sown, partly with wheat and partly with barley. The wheat gave them bread, though rye was also largely used; the barley gave malt for their ale, of which they required a good deal, each man drinking from a gallon to three gallons a day. The ale had no hops in it till the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

**Farm Stock.** But farming requires stock; what stock had the villein of the eleventh century? First and most important were his oxen. The plough of this date was a clumsy heavy wooden affair with an iron tip and was usually drawn by eight oxen. An ordinary villein, holding a virgate (usually 30 acres) of land, was not rich enough to keep eight oxen, he possibly had two. He joined up with three others to make the full team and thus ploughed his strips in his turn. The lord usually had his own plough-teams on the demesne, but the villein lent his oxen as well along with his services. The villager fed his oxen partly on the common waste land, partly on the stubble of the arable after the crops were gathered when the fencing was taken down, and partly on the meadows. These meadows were the most valuable part of the village and were fenced in and hay was grown on them. They too were divided into strips and these strips with the hay growing on them were distributed, often by lot, among the holders of arable land. Besides his oxen the villein might have a few sheep and a cow or so, together with pigs, fowls, geese, and ducks, all of which picked up a precarious living on the waste. This waste was very extensive; Domesday Book shows a very large area of it apart from Yorkshire, which it will be remembered had been harried by William in 1068, and did not recover in a century. There was also the great

PLOUGHING



fen district, besides large heaths in Surrey and other counties. Other causes of large wastes may have been the inroads of lawless raiders and pirates, the devastations of the King's Host, castle-building, and general extortion. But apart from all these, each village was surrounded by common waste land and its rights in it were jealously guarded. For it is not too much to say that without this uncultivated land the villager could not have lived. From it he drew wood for building, for fencing, for fuel, turf also for this last, while on it lived much of his stock. In the winter he could only depend on his hay with some peas and beans for fodder, so autumn saw a great slaughter of stock, which was salted down for winter use. The few cattle that survived to the spring did so in a very poor half-starved condition, and a prolonged winter might reduce the smaller villeins to ruin.

This peculiar system of 'open-field' agriculture had many disadvantages, the chief being the difficulty of improving the farming and making experiments. All had to farm in exactly the same way, the sowing, ploughing and reaping all depended on several persons combining to work together, while the ground was manured chiefly by pasturing the village stock over it indiscriminately. It was no use for one farmer to 'clean' his land, that is clear it of weeds, if his neighbours of the next strips neglected theirs, the weeds upon which would soon seed over the land of the more energetic worker. Its advantages were considerable, however, in a primitive society, where fighting was often necessary and the man away on military service could depend on his neighbours to keep the land cultivated. The reason for the strips has been much debated, but it seems probable that the object was fairness, so that each man should get his share of good and bad land. There was also convenience so that each man's land got ploughed in turn.

**Origin of the Manor.** How did the system outlined above come about? Is it complete or nearly complete in the time of Domesday Book? These two questions have raised a great controversy among historians and even now are not conclusively answered.

(1) The first theory (for the history of western Europe from A. D. 450-600 must unfortunately be largely guess-work) is that the Anglo-Saxon settlers drove out the Romanized or partially Romanized Briton, entirely from Eastern and Southern Britain, and to a very large extent from the west, until they were stopped by the mountain fastnesses of Wales and Devon and Cumberland. It is supposed that on the new land thus cleared the Anglo-Saxons settled in village communities of free men, each holding land enough to keep him and his household ; that often these villages were inhabited entirely by men of one kin, that the suffix 'ing' in place-names indicates such a colony of relatives, and that such slaves as there were were men captured in battle, the new-comers being all free men who bowed to none. Gradually, however, this equality disappeared ; men rose to wealth and honour, either by service with the King in his many wars, often rewarded by special grants of extra land, or by the acceptance of collective responsibilities such as collecting the taxes from the rest of the village, which saved the other villagers trouble, while they forgot that it gave the collector power. In all sorts of ways during 600 years, more than half of which were times of constant fighting, surely and slowly arose an aristocracy of war or of service. Large grants of land to monastic and other ecclesiastical bodies helped in the same direction. Monks and nuns might be humble individuals, but a community of them with a royal princess as Abbess at their head was likely to be a powerful landholder upsetting the balance of any village community. The Abbeys were among the best farmers, and they took ideas from Rome rather than from the heathen customs of their race. Hence by the time the Danes arrived, something very like a manor was taking the place of the English vill and transforming the free cultivator into something not far removed from a serf.

The Danish settlement upset this tendency for a time and studded the eastern counties with villages of free men, free in a sense in which the ceorl of Saxon days, the villanus of Domesday Book, was ceasing to be, though it must not be forgotten

that the villein of the eleventh century was reckoned a free man in personal status, having a wer-gild of £4, if any one killed him, that of a slave being 40*d*. We also find that the villein, unlike a slave, could be a member of a court and a witness; he possessed arms and paid taxes. The freemen and socmen of the Danish counties, their vills with no lord, suggest that originally Anglo-Saxon immigrants had started with free villages and that inequalities of status were of later growth. Domesday Book shows us in Lincoln, Norfolk, and Suffolk the freest population, the most prosperous and the densest, while freedom, prosperity, and density decrease as we go westward. So much for the theory of the free village community.

(2) Forty years ago this was the accepted history of our nation. But since then the version has been strongly attacked by certain French scholars, who maintain that the free 'mark' inhabited by men of free birth and equal standing is a figment of Teutonic imagination, and they have been supported by some English historians of weight. The rival theory is roughly this:—That the Anglo-Saxons did not clear the land of British, that they found here the highly organized Roman system of a 'villa' owned by a lord and cultivated by 'coloni', men tied to the soil, holding their land by tenure of services in cultivating the lord's demesne, and that the Anglo-Saxons merely displaced, or occupied the vacant places of the Roman lords, and kept on the British as serfs tied to the soil; thus you would have the manorial system at once.

Which of these theories has the greater probability? On the whole the balance is in favour of the free community for, at least, the tract of country from Durham to the English Channel and between the Severn and a line from the Chilterns to the Wash. It is difficult on the other theory to account for the total disappearance of the language of the conquered race—hardly any Celtic words have survived into modern English, while in Gaul, where something like the second version did take place, the language has remained Romance and Celtic. Also Domesday Book shows us that the free village community existed

among the Danish invaders and was imposed by them on the counties they occupied; it seems likely that their Anglo-Saxon cousins had done much the same five centuries before. The two- and three-field system was also characteristic later on of that district between the Elbe and the Weser, whence our English ancestors came. But it is likely also that the history of Western England was somewhat different. The comparative absence of freemen and the large increase in the number of slaves (there were some 24 per cent. in Gloucestershire and none in Lincolnshire) suggest that Roman, or more probably Celtic, influences survived there and profoundly modified the customs of the Anglo-Saxons. It is probable that the variety of the eleventh century was not produced by any one tendency, but by an equilibrium of opposing forces. The two- and three-field systems described above are only to be found in the centre of England. Trace a line from Durham through mid-Yorkshire east of the Pennines, skirting the Peak and southern Cheshire to the Welsh border, thence south to Monmouthshire and south-east to Gloucester, along the coast to the Quantock Hills and south-east to Weymouth—this is the western boundary of the two- and three-field system. For the eastern we have a twisting line from Boston skirting the fens round the Wash to the borders of Suffolk, along the Chiltern heights to the Thames above Reading, south to the borders of Sussex and along the chalk downs to Beachy Head. It is a large area but it is not all England. North and west and south-west of it are mountain lands where Celtic Britain stood at bay and where the conquerors were quite unable to exterminate their predecessors. There, in Cumberland, Lancashire, Cheshire, Wales, Devon and Cornwall, the agricultural systems that prevailed have left traces showing a system very different from the typical plans of the central district and with strong likenesses to those of Scotland and Ireland. Large nucleated villages give place to small hamlets of less than ten families, holdings are not arranged in two or three large fields, and traces exist of *runrig*, a system by which constant subdivision and re-distribution were made. To the east in Kent,

Essex and East Anglia a different arrangement is discoverable, bearing strong resemblances to the Roman villa and suggesting that, whatever may have happened in Mercia and Wessex, in these eastern counties Rome was not utterly obliterated.

**Effect of the Norman Conquest.** What was the effect of the Norman Conquest on the organizations of the country? Domesday Book supplies a partial answer. The rule of the Norman kings was before all else a strong rule—a rule that would have order in the kingdom at all costs. Consequently, since officials find uniformity much easier to administer than diversity, the tendency was to compress the social organism into one mould, the manor. The result of this is seen in :

(a) The disappearance of the small free farmer who did not hold his land by military service. He found it more and more difficult to distinguish himself from the ordinary villein, who in his turn was being depressed towards slavery. In Cambridgeshire there were 900 socmen in the time of Edward the Confessor and only 200 in 1086. Domesday Book itself helped in the same direction. Many freemen held land by service tenure, and Domesday Book tends to rank a man not by his birth, but by the terms on which he held his land.

(b) The slave almost disappeared as the result of the Norman Conquest. He probably became absorbed in the class of cotters, which increased in numbers. The reason here was probably economy—it paid better to give a slave a house and a piece of ground and tell him to keep himself, than to feed and clothe him. In return for this little piece of ground the lord probably got nearly as much work as before and of a good bit better quality.

(c) The villein, who was a freeman with very definite customary rights before the Conquest, lost much of his status. His *wer-gild*, which ranked him as a freeman, ceased to be of importance, when murder was no longer atoned for by money. His Norman lord was likely to listen little to the rights of one whom he regarded as a member of a conquered race. Thus many causes combined to make the Norman villein a much less 'law-worthy' person than his ancestor the Anglo-Saxon *eorl*. What the



culmination of the tendencies was to which the Norman Conquest gave a strong fresh impetus, we shall see in the twelfth century. Meanwhile, the villager lived his life much as before, growing his food and clothing, with subsistence enough, if coarse and monotonous, not greatly caring whether William or Edward ruled the country, awaking occasionally to grumble at perhaps a stronger hand and more exacting rule from his lord, or to bitter complaint when the new king's passion for hunting swept away him and his land and his rights, to enclose a forest for the royal pleasure. Except during the anarchy of Stephen's reign, when the lords built castles and filled them with 'devils and wicked men', the village economy went on much as usual for another century.

**Women.** It is thought that the Anglo-Saxons did not originally allow women to hold land, only movable property like furniture. There is, however, no evidence on the point, and very early we find them in possession of land. Professor Vinogradoff thinks this change arose in connexion with *boc-land*, which was land granted to individuals by special charter from the king and the transaction recorded on parchment. This custom arose chiefly in grants to the church, but spread to other holders, among whom we find women. At the time of the Conquest Royal Ladies held large estates all over the country, and holdings by women of all classes appear in Domesday Book. An especially interesting case is that of one Asa, who is stated to have held land separately from her husband and free of his control, and to have taken her land with her when she separated from him; on her death it was granted to her heir and not to her husband.

When a woman held land, in whatever rank (and we find her doing so as tenant-in-chief down every grade to the smallest villein), she performed its services, in the higher ranks often though not always by proxy, in the lower there is little doubt she carried them through in person. The Norman Conquest, by the bias of the conquerors towards primogeniture, tended to lower the status of women, though the constant wars and feuds often depleted a family of its male heirs in three generations.

Then the estates fell to a woman, and with them all the numerous and onerous public burdens attached. The heiress performed these duties and we find her doing homage and also receiving it in person. Prior to 1268 women did suit of court, i.e. attended the court as assessors, in person, for in that year we find the Statute of Marlborough excusing them attendance at the Sheriff's 'Turn'.

Among the villeins and smaller freemen, the widow frequently took up the holding and performed the duties. Sometimes women held land jointly with their husbands, in which case the survivor continued to hold it till death. Times later than the eleventh century show us women occupying all the village offices : c. g. constable, overseer, pinder (keeper of the pound for straying animals), and reeve.<sup>1</sup> There is no reason to suppose they did not do so at the earlier date. Most important of all, by Common Law a woman had her right of dower, which remained to her till 1833. This was usually one-third, though it might be one-half of her husband's estate. Of the actual work done by women we have little evidence before the end of the twelfth century, so a description of this side of their economic position will be left to the second part of this book.

**Summary.** Let us sum up our knowledge of eleventh-century England :

1. It was a land of villages, which lived largely by a system of agriculture known as the open-field system, and each village supplied nearly all its own wants.

2. The land was officially divided into manors, most of them perhaps coinciding with the vills, but not always so. A fully developed manor was controlled by a lord, who held a considerable part of the land in demesne. This demesne was cultivated by the villagers, each working so many days a week, and in return they had land of their own, which they cultivated with the help of their neighbours. But in the eleventh century the manors were not completely organized, and were often different from this standard pattern.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 38.

3. We find besides the lord, some six classes of men : freemen, socmen, villeins, bordars, cotters, and slaves.

4. The Norman Conquest tended to depress the condition of the ordinary villager, to make freemen and socmen diminish in numbers and the villein less free. It, however, nearly abolished the lowest class of slaves, who became cotters

5. Women when they held land had exactly the same economic position as men, but the Norman Conquest tended to prevent them holding land, and by the feudal customs of wardship and marriage<sup>1</sup> to lower their personal status.

## 2. Towns and Trade

We said in the last chapter that England in the eleventh century was a land of villages, and this was true, but we must not therefore suppose that there were no towns whatever. Domesday Book, which as we have seen is our chief authority, enumerates some hundred boroughs besides several market-towns not called boroughs. Rutland and Cornwall indeed seem the only counties without boroughs, and Cornwall had five market-towns. In the eleventh century London was, as now, the chief city ; next in order came Winchester, Bristol, Norwich, York, and Lincoln, none of them numbering more than 7,000 to 8,000 inhabitants. Indeed, most of the boroughs and towns were little more than overgrown villages, places where for one reason or another different types of people had come to live and trade and where industry had as a consequence sprung up. A large part of their population continued to live by agriculture, and villeins and bordars appear in a Domesday Book town just as they do in a rural vill. But besides these there were others who, though they held a little land, certainly did not live by it, their occupation and livelihood depending on industry or trade, or more often on both. They were called burgesses and they had special duties and special rights. The burgess was usually

<sup>1</sup> See p. 27.

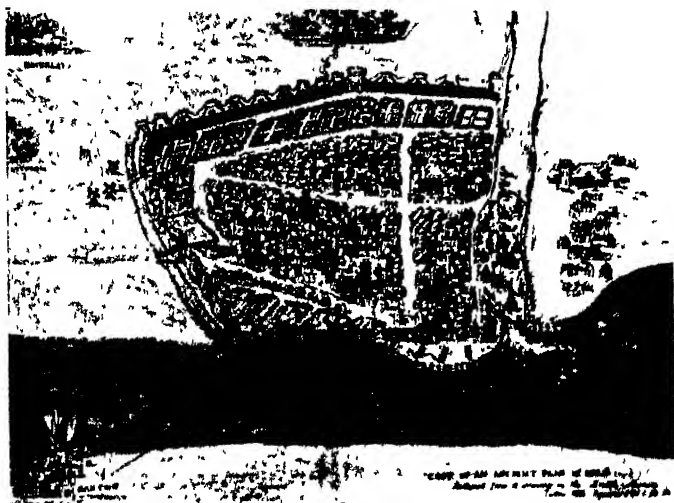
a freeman, but not always, for in Ipswich we find one who was a slave.

**Origin of the Towns.** How came these towns to exist?

1. **THE TOWN AS STRONGHOLD.** We know that when Rome withdrew her protecting legions in the fifth century she left behind her many a flourishing trading city and fortified stronghold, for we can to-day still see the walls she built around them. But the Anglo-Saxons hated cities, they loved a free open-air life, and, in the main, they stayed outside and left the fine old towns to fall to ruin. Exeter almost alone of all our towns has a continuous history from Roman days to ours, and that is because the Saxons did not conquer it till a late date, when they had learnt the use of a walled city. For a time came when the need for defence against each other, and later against marauding Danes, made the old walls a valuable refuge, and we even find the Saxons founding towns, as Ine did Taunton in A. D. 710, or the Lady of Mercia, two centuries later, the great fortified burghs of the midlands. By the eleventh century there are one or more fortified towns in every county, and there seems some reason to think that they were the result of a deliberate policy, for many country estates had a house in a neighbouring town and on that house fell the duty of helping to repair the city walls. This suggests that these towns were a sort of refuge for the county, and the duty of garrisoning them and repairing the walls was laid on the rural estates for that reason. In one case a town house was given to a nunnery explicitly as a place of refuge.

2. **THE TOWN AS TRADING CENTRE.** But the main cause of the growth of towns was, then as now, trade. Thus we find them on the main trade routes, at cross-roads as Aylesbury, on river crossings as Oxford, by harbours as Bristol or Southampton, near important fisheries as Gloucester and Yarmouth, or, like St. Albans, Bury St. Edmunds, or the Welsh border towns, sheltered in the shadow of churches, monasteries, and castles, places that brought together travellers of all kinds, out of whom the enterprising trader could win a living. The Danes were great traders and their conquest of the country largely increased the number of towns.

**Organization of the Eleventh-century Borough.** (1) Where the borough was part of a lord's estate it differed little from any other township. The burgesses paid other dues than labour on the lord's demesne but whatever they paid they paid to him, and he was their lord, just as he was to his rural tenants. He was said to 'hold' the borough.



A WALLED TOWN. An early plan of Hull.

(2) But there were boroughs that did not belong to any one lord, and to a certain extent the burgesses of such boroughs managed their own affairs. The king's dues and rents were collected by the prepositus or reeve and handed over to the official who farmed them. For the king usually rented his dues for a fixed sum to some one, who took his chance of getting less or possibly more from the burgesses. This farmer of the king's dues was often the sheriff of the county, though, even at this early period, we find one town itself farming its rents and dues direct from the king; this precocious town was Northampton. The Reeve of the town was its leader, but he was subordinate to

the sheriff of the county, except in London, where he seems to have taken the place of the sheriff, as if London were a county.

There are one or two instances in Domesday Book of towns holding common property, e.g. Exeter and Colchester, but as yet it was rare. The town had its own court for settlement of disputes and for minor criminal offences, and it is generally supposed to have been free from obligation to attend the hundred court. The fines went to the king and the earl of the county, except in cases of offence in the houses of certain burgesses who held jurisdiction over their own houses and their tenants.

Most boroughs had a mint; 26 such are mentioned in Domesday Book, Hereford having as many as 7. In the tenth century London had 8 and Winchester 6.

**The Rights and Duties of Eleventh-century Burgesses.** The burgesses had usually got rid of agricultural services, but they did not thereby escape service of all kinds.

(a) They paid rent, either in money or produce. They had to a large extent commuted produce rents for money, but under Edward the Confessor they had paid such various commodities as honey, furs, corn, herrings, salt, goat-skins or hides, a hawk, a mantle, a bear and six dogs to bait it. One feels that it is to the credit of the Conqueror that he substituted a race-horse for these last.

(b) Boroughs had to provide so many men for military service, or, in the case of ports, for sea-service. Another due sometimes levied was horses for the king's journey.

(c) A few agricultural services survived, especially boon-work at harvest time, but above all suit of mill, i.e. the duty of carrying all grain to be ground at the lord's mill. Manchester did not free itself from this feudal due till the eighteenth century, and only finally shook off the pressure of its overlord by the middle of the nineteenth.

Such were the duties of the burgesses; what of their privileges?

(a) As we have seen, they were exempt from most of the labour services exacted from rural tenants.

(b) Their main privilege, however, was the right to sell their holding without obtaining a licence. This was common but not universal.

Apart from these two privileges there does not seem at this period to be a great deal of difference between town and country, but in the next chapter we shall see how the towns wrested more and more liberty from their overlords, while the wealth of increasing trade and the habit of living in a close community enabled them to combine in a way impossible to the more fettered and scattered rural population.

**Markets and Fairs.** Probably every town had a market. This was a fixed place where men could buy and sell openly and before all, and where alone they were allowed to do so. All Anglo-Saxon and mediæval kings tried their utmost to control the channels of trade, for two reasons:—

(a) To prevent traffic in stolen goods. If a man could only sell in open market and in the presence of witnesses there was a better chance of detecting stolen property. Also in an age when writers and documents were scarce, the word of an eye-witness was the only evidence for sale. Property sold thus in the authorized place and before witnesses remained with the buyer, even if it afterwards was proved to have been stolen.

(b) To make sure that the king got his tolls, for no small part of his revenue was from trading tolls. If things were bought and sold in secret he thereby lost revenue.

But a third reason existed for authorized markets. The whole idea of the age was towards a monopoly of trade, and we shall see in the next century how anxiously the traders worked to keep it in the hands of certain licensed people. The idea that it was good for the nation to have unlimited competition would have seemed to them the utterance of a madman, and would have roused an outcry from every class of society. But if trade was to be in the hands of the few, then it must take place openly, so that illicit traders could be detected and ousted. So for centuries the market was the trading place of the district. At these markets could be bought by the townsman and villager

such few things as he himself did not produce, and the villager sometimes disposed of his surplus produce and took in exchange the articles manufactured by the townsman.

But while the weekly market supplied the simple needs of the district, there was, even in the eleventh century, a demand for luxuries and expensive necessities on the part of richer men, that had to be met. These were provided by the fairs, of which only two are mentioned in Domesday Book. They were many and important by the end of two centuries more. These fairs were markets on a large scale specially licensed, generally for the time of a church festival, and to them came merchants from all parts bringing rare and costly goods, as well as ordinary articles in general use. We shall hear much of them in the next period of our history.

**Trade in the Eleventh Century.** At the time of the Conquest England had considerable trade, chiefly in luxuries. Both the Anglo-Saxon and the Dane held trade in honour and as early as the eighth century we hear of an English merchant at Marseilles, while, in the ninth, Offa, King of Mercia, was negotiating protection for English merchants from Charlemagne. There was, too, much intercourse with Rome and with monasteries on the Continent, with considerable letter-carrying to and fro. The Danes were traders even more than they were pirates, though they found a combination of both very successful, and to the merchant who had made three voyages in his own ship was given the rank of thegn.

By the end of the eleventh century there were three chief trade routes :

1. With France and Flanders from London, Southampton, Sandwich, Dover, and the Kentish ports generally.
2. A slave trade from Chester and Bristol to the Danes in Ireland.
3. From London, Grimsby, Lincoln, Norwich and Ipswich via Scandinavia and Russia to the East.

The trade consisted mainly of luxuries such as 'purple cloth, silk, gems and gold, garments, pigments, wine, oil, ivory, brass,



copper, tin, sulphur, glass and such like'. The merchants were mostly foreigners, for Englishmen had largely lost the trick of seafaring and it was some time before English trade was carried on in English ships.

**Industries.** The industries of England at this period were not numerous. As we have seen, most things the villager used he made himself, and only in the towns, where dwelt not 10 per cent. of the population, did a man live by craft. Among the manufactures which existed the chief were, tin (in Devon), lead (chiefly in Derbyshire), iron (in Gloucester, Hereford, Sussex and Cheshire), and salt at Droitwich. We also hear of potters and smiths, leatherworkers and shoemakers. It seems strange to think of iron in rural districts, for now we associate its manufacture with the coal areas of the north and midlands. But coal was little used and not at all for smelting, so the neighbourhood of forests was essential to produce the charcoal that was used for fuel.

**Effect of the Norman Conquest on the Towns.** The immediate effect seems to have been the destruction of many houses to make room for the castle, but they appear to have recovered quickly and to have prospered. The strong rule of the Norman kings gave a peace and order very favourable to trade and industry, and the kings encouraged the towns in every way. Besides this there was a large influx of aliens immediately after the Conquest, an influx consisting chiefly of traders and artisans. These gave a fresh impulse to industry and commerce, and, as we shall see in the next two centuries, prosperity produced liberty, which spreading from town to nation laid broadly the foundations of that peculiar thing called English freedom.

**Summary.** 1. Although England at the time of the Conquest was mainly an agricultural country, still some hundred or so towns did exist, and already showed signs of coming independence.

2. Trade went on at markets and fairs. At the former the trade was in the commodities of the district, in the latter the imported luxuries of the age were gathered and sold.

3. Overseas trade in the eleventh century was mainly in the hands of foreigners and in foreign ships, Englishmen having deteriorated in enterprise since the ninth century.

4. Industries were few and, so far, little organized.

### 3. The King's Revenue. The Army

WE have seen now how the ordinary folk of the land got their living, our next inquiry must be how were the expenses of government met? Now to understand the attitude of the men of the early Middle Ages towards taxation we must get rid of several modern ideas that seem to us quite natural and essential, but which are really the result of growth and development. We pay taxes now to meet the expenses of the whole complicated system of government, and every year Parliament decrees how much those taxes shall be and on what objects they are to be spent. If something new has to be done by the State, then Parliament votes fresh money for that particular purpose, as when in 1870 the Government decided to carry on at the public expense the education of the nation. Or suppose it was decided that henceforth the shipping of the country or the railways or the beer should be State property, then Parliament might vote the necessary millions to buy out the existing owners. But in the eleventh century no such ideas existed. It was the king's business to govern and it was also his business to find the money, not come to ordinary people for it. Nothing was more definite in most peoples' minds than that 'the king should live of his own'. For his household, for his court, even for his soldiers often, he and he alone must find the means. Obviously then we must ask what had the king of his own by which to live? We shall find it was no small property.

**The Royal Domesne.** First and largest of his resources came the demesne lands of the Crown, which by 1086 included not only the 'ancient demesne' of Edward Confessor, but all the enormous additions that had fallen to William by confiscation from rebellious subjects. Domesday Book gives 1,422 royal manors,

besides farms and lands in Middlesex, Shropshire, and Rutland. On the demesne were forest-lands where the king hunted and whence he drew supplies of venison for his household. From the rural villages he drew the actual food on which he lived, corn and ale, meat and poultry, milk, cheese, pigeons, geese and swans. Like any other great lord, he and his household consumed much of this by moving from manor to manor. But while a lord even of a hundred manors might manage so to use their produce, it is evident that in quite early times there must have been lands of his own that the king never saw, and quite early too it must have proved easier to sell the produce and send the king the money. The cost of entertaining the king for a night, known as a night's 'farm', was estimated at from £80 to £100. Such money was collected by the sheriff and sent to the king. In the towns on the royal demesne money-rents soon took the place of produce, and as it was easier to collect money from townspeople living close together than from scattered villages, where often money could not be had and hens or pigs had to be accepted, we find the towns complaining they had to pay more than their share. They secured very soon a separate assessment, and later they bought leave to collect it themselves.

**Feudal Dues.** While the produce of the royal lands supplied the king with the ordinary needs of existence, we must also remember he was the greatest feudal lord in the land, and the incidents of feudal tenure were very profitable. The chief were:—

1. **AIDS.** These were special grants of money from his tenants-in-chief for three particular occasions, viz. knighting his eldest son, marrying his eldest daughter, and ransoming his person in case of capture.

2. **WARDSHIP AND MARRIAGE.** By these rights he secured :

(a) The administration of the lands of heirs and heiresses under age. The profits were large.

(b) The right to marry an heiress to whom he would. This right he often sold for a good round sum.

3. **RELIEFS.** Sums paid by an heir on taking up his estate ; ~~at first~~ indefinite in amount, they later became fixed.

4. **PRIMER SEISIN.** The right to the first year's revenue after the death of a tenant. This right eventually belonged to the king alone.

All these four incidents were of great value, and unscrupulous kings like John made a lot of money in that way. Marriages in particular were valuable. They varied in cost, the highest recorded is that of Isabel, Countess of Gloucester, in Henry III's reign, for which Geoffrey de Mandeville paid 20,000 marks.

5. **ESCHEAT.** By this lands without an heir went to the king.

**Profits of Jurisdiction.** The mediaeval idea of jurisdiction was inextricably mixed up with money. Indeed, it has been well said that 'mediaeval justice was mostly finance, though mediaeval finance was not always justice'. Among the early German races, with whom pecuniary punishments were universal, the idea was general that two indemnities were due, the *bot* or payment to the injured and the *wite* or payment to the king or whoever held the jurisdiction. It was thought only fair that he who took the trouble to decide the case and maintain the law should be paid for his work. By the eleventh century a good deal of private jurisdiction had arisen and the king had granted away many of his rights to others, but in all such grants there were some pleas always reserved for the Crown. They vary usually from three to six. The six were: housebreaking, breach of the king's peace, highway robbery, murder, entertaining an outlaw, and adultery.

**Other Sources of Revenue.** There were several other smaller items, rather of the nature of windfalls, in the royal revenue; some of them exist to-day. Such were *waiifs* or goods thrown away by the thief in his flight, *strayed animals* with no owner, *wreck*, *whales* and *great sturgeons*, *treasure trove*. To these may be added two others that do not appear till the next century, but may be mentioned here for the sake of completion:

(a) Payment by the towns for liberties and charters.

(b) Payment for grants of fairs and markets.

**Danegeld.** This was the only due in the eleventh century that we should call a direct tax. It originated in the tenth century

as money to buy off the Danes, and was organized later by Canute as a national tax. Originally it was only levied for special occasions, but later regularly on every 'hide' of land. Hence it was eventually known as hidage and carucage. It was for the proper assessment of this tax that William caused the Domesday survey to be made. The royal demesne usually escaped this geld, since it had to supply the king's farm.

**Purveyance and Pre-emption.** Two other rights of the king helped to increase his income in fact if not in cash. Purveyance, the right to impress conveyances and horses for the king's use, and pre-emption, the right to buy supplies at a fixed and usually a low price; both these were a heavy burden on the districts in which the king stayed or through which he moved. Allied to these was PRISAGE, the right to one or two casks from each ship bringing wine to England. There were some few other trading tolls or customs, among them probably an export duty on wool.

**The Army.** Before the Conquest there were several sources from which the kings drew an army.

1. There was the FYRD or general levy of all able-bodied men in the kingdom. Sometimes it included every possible man led by the parochial priests; this was for home defence and was called out as late as the Battle of the Standard, 1138. More often it consisted of a representative from every household in the kingdom. It was an unwieldy host, very difficult to feed and to maintain at any decent level of equipment. It remained a possible source of power down to modern times and was the ancestor of the militia.

2. The Saxon and Danish kings had a body of HUSCARLES. These were picked professional soldiers and formed the royal bodyguard, but were also the centre and most important part of any army collected. They were well paid and lived at the king's expense.

3. There were also MERCENARIES hired by the kings either for special occasions or for permanent defence. The Saxon and Danish navies were of this kind.

After the Conquest, when the military tenure of lands became more definite, the fyrd sank to an unimportant place, the hus-carles ceased to exist, and the feudal host of heavily armed knights replaced them. Mercenaries were not unknown, but were difficult to maintain since coin was scarce. Often the forty-days knight's service which feudal tenants had to give at their own cost was extended and payment made by the king. There was no difficulty in getting soldiers, for every great lord's house had



SAXON FOOTMEN AND NORMAN CAVALRY

a number of knights and sergeants and squires who spent their time between warlike exercises and the delights of hunting. They held little or no land, and lived at the expense of their lord, ready to follow his banner at any moment. On the borders of Wales and Scotland they were, of course, particularly numerous.

**Summary.** 1. In the eleventh century there was no national income at the disposal of the Government. The king was expected to govern and to pay the cost out of his own possessions, like any other feudal lord. 'The king shall live of his own.' As, however, he was the greatest landowner in the country, the royal demesne after the Conquest being very large, this was at first quite possible.

2. Besides his demesne the king was entitled to numerous feudal dues from his tenants-in-chief, and these were a valuable part of his income.

3. The profits of administering justice, when most crimes were punished by fines, were considerable, and certain pleas were reserved for the Crown.

4. There were other royal rights of which the most profitable were purveyance and pre-emption.

5. Danegeld was the only direct national tax.

6. During the eleventh century the army was transformed from the national fyrd with a nucleus of huscarles, to a feudal host of armed and mounted knights supported by followers from their own manors.

## PART II

### CHANGES BY THE END OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

#### I. The Manorial System in its Prime

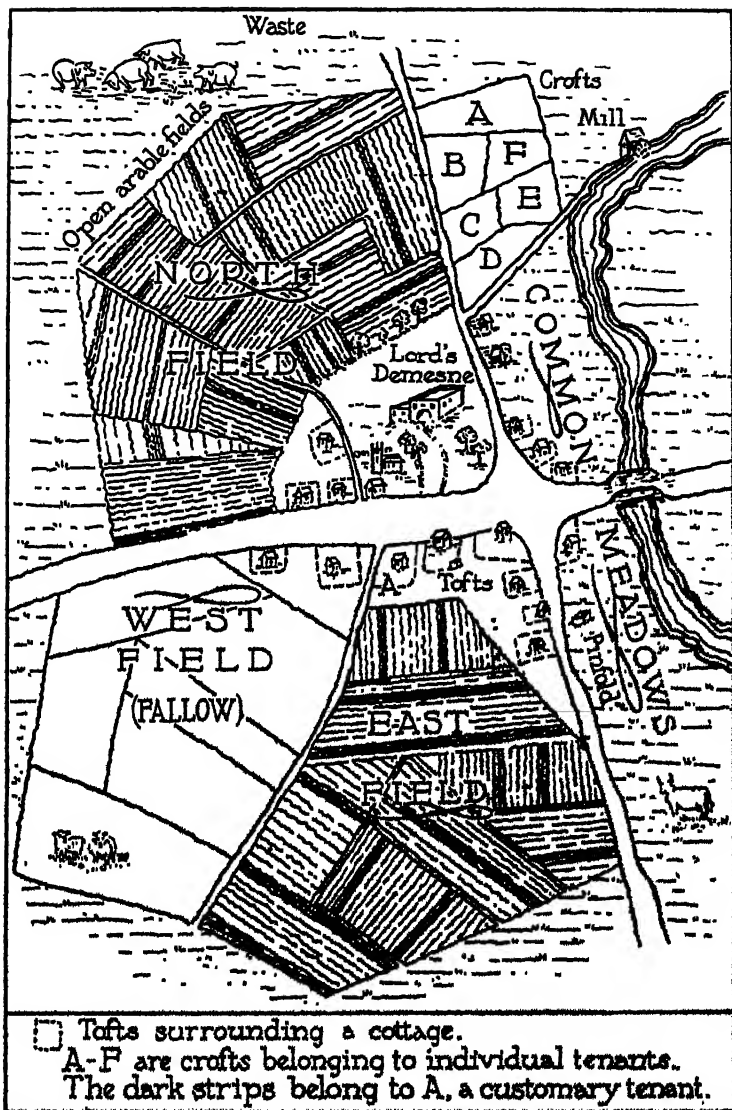
THE twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the complete organization of England on the manorial system, and also the beginning of its decline. Let us try to picture this system at its height. We have seen in Part I how the strong rule of the Norman kings tended to reduce the organization of the country to the feudal pattern, though William I's action, in claiming direct allegiance to himself from all, prevented the worst forms of feudal anarchy and tyranny. Still the arrangement has been aptly compared by Maitland to a pyramid of broad base and low height, the slope of which the Norman conquest tended to steepen.

**The Unfree Peasant.** Starting from the lowest layer of this pyramid, the basis on which the whole was built, we find in the twelfth century the unfree peasant for the most part *adscriptus* (bound) to the land. We may divide him into three classes :

1. **THE SLAVE CLASS.** This was small in number and the slave as an absolute chattel of his master had disappeared by the end of the thirteenth century.

2. **THE COTTER,** holding about 3-5 acres of land round his cottage, which he cultivated with the help of his family, and paying some labour services as rent to his lord. He had no share in the common fields and possessed no oxen. Possibly he eked out a scanty living by working also for the richer villeins. This cotter class was more important than would appear at the first





glance. They were numerous all over the country, and they had a position less bound by tradition and capable of swifter change than had the holder of a virgate in the common field. Five acres of land could only support a family if cultivated more as a garden than as fields, with spade and hoe rather than plough. The cotter might keep a cow or two and sell his milk, but he would be bound to add to his resources by hiring himself out as a labourer. Here we find then the beginnings of a class of agricultural wage-earners, and also of tiny holdings not cultivated according to the fixed round of immemorial tradition. Both will be of importance in the future. It is among this class that the change from service rent to money payment first begins, and it had made considerable progress before the end of the thirteenth century.

3. THE VILLEIN PROPER, who formed the bulk of the nation, and the basis of its economy. He usually held a virgate (30 acres) or half-virgate of land distributed in strips about the common fields with his share of the meadows, when the lord did not keep these for his own use, together with rights of pasture for his animals on the fallow, the field stubble and the waste. In return for this he paid labour services to the lord—one, two, or three days week-work, and at harvest and other times of pressure boon-work by himself and all his family, except the housewife. He would, in this work, plough, sow, and reap a fixed portion of the demesne, using his own oxen and often his own seed. He might also have to pay certain portions of his produce, his fowls, geese, honey, &c., to the lord.

So far he may seem to be a small tenant-farmer, paying in labour and produce instead of money, but we have not yet come to the end of his obligations. All the above could be paid, and sometimes were paid, by freemen and socmen, but the villein was also in a state of personal dependence. He could not leave his holding even if he wished, and as we shall see in the next chapter the towns were beginning to have attractions; at his death the lord resumed the land, though custom decreed that it should usually be handed back to the heir on payment of a fine;

he could not sell his stock or marry his daughter, sometimes not even his son, without the lord's consent. He had to pasture his beasts in the lord's demesne, to cart and carry at his lord's orders, and lastly, could apparently be turned out of his land at the will of the lord, for in 1280 the Abbot of Burton successfully asserted his right to eject his tenants if it pleased him. The lawyers had by this time decided, probably contrary to what had been the ancient custom of the realm, that the villein could not sue his lord in the courts. As for the members of the villein's household, brothers and younger sons, they were villeins by birth and could be disposed of at the will of the lord, they formed the bulk of the manorial and personal servants of the lord, and, though not slaves, were in a very real sense his property. Lastly, a villein was liable to be taxed at the lord's will. Now all this sounds very like slavery, and yet as a matter of fact the villein had rights as an individual, and still more as a member of a corporate body. (1) First of all, he could secure justice in the courts against any one but his lord. You could not rob, injure, or cheat a villein with impunity, indeed you were liable to bring his lord down on you as well, and to pay accordingly. (2) Although the lord was in law absolute, the custom of these village communities was so strong that he rarely ventured on an open or gross injustice. (3) The lord wanted labourers quite as much as the villeins wanted land, so it did not pay to eject his tenants. Even the overbearing Abbot mentioned above reinstated his recalcitrant villeins after he had sufficiently humiliated them.

Modern economic doctrine had no place in the twelfth century; custom took the place of competition, and rent in the modern sense was unknown. One of the difficulties in our getting a grasp of mediæval life is the absence of competition, and the strong public feeling against any exhibition of it. Without competition and the free movement of labour, modern economic theory falls to the ground.

**The Freeman and the Socman.** Above the villein in status, though often not in material prosperity, we find two classes, the freeman and the socman of Domesday. The freeman was

connected with the manor chiefly through the manorial courts of which we shall speak later, and by certain feudal dues such as wardship<sup>1</sup> and marriage,<sup>1</sup> relief,<sup>1</sup> &c. These we shall speak of in connexion with the lord's relations to the king. Briefly we may say that as the lord held his land of the king, so the freeman held his of the lord, often too by tenure of military service. He had the right to dispose of it as he pleased.

The socman of Domesday Book, by the end of the twelfth century, had either been depressed into villeinage or had succeeded in maintaining his freedom and held his land by the less menial services. This class was fairly numerous, and the lawyers were beginning to call all free tenure, not that of military service, tenure in socage. He performed labour services, usually not week-work, only boon-work, and owed suit of court to the lord's court, i. e. was bound to attend it, but he was a freeman and could sue his lord in the king's courts. The line between the villein and the socman was often difficult to draw, and the courts devised various tests, though the assumption was usually made that a man was a villein unless he could prove the contrary. The men of Kent were generally successful in getting themselves recognized as socagers, many others were not. The chief tests of villeinage were performance of week-work, payment of merchet (fine for marrying a daughter), or holding the office of reeve.

**The Lord.** We have referred several times to the lord of the manor, and so far he seems to be a sort of all-powerful tyrant against whom no one had any rights. But he was not the apex of the pyramid—he might even be a long way down its slope. For the essential point in the Feudal System was that every one was responsible to some one else—every one held his land 'of' some one else; topmost of all came the king. In any given manor the lord might be holding direct of the king, i. e. he might be a tenant-in-chief, or there might be one or more in between him and the king. But whomever he held it from, he paid rent for it by military service, i. e. he was bound to give the king his personal aid and that of a fixed number of followers in time of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 27.

war, and there was plenty of war in those days. Besides this he had to pay all the feudal obligations described before in the account of the king's revenue.<sup>1</sup> Wardships and marriages, in particular, were a heavy burden on the estate, and we find mothers buying the wardship of their children and women the right to arrange their own marriages. King John so abused his rights in this respect, that we find one of the chief clauses of Magna Carta dealing with the grievance.

The questions arise, Where did the lord get the money for all this? How did he live and keep up the state of a great or small feudal lord? As to living, he lived literally on the produce of his manor or manors. If, as was often the case, he owned several, he moved from one to the other, staying a month or more at each, and having eaten up its stores passed on to the next. It was the business of his officers to see that the food was there ready for him on his arrival with his family and servants and men-at-arms. Here we see the use of the produce rents of some of the peasants. A few dozen fowls, eggs, and honey become a matter of importance in such a hungry household.

As for money, he sold the surplus produce of his demesne in the markets which were becoming numerous, or grew wool for export with profits increasing as we get to the thirteenth century. Some of the great lords held as many as 100 manors, and such large estates were often called 'honours'. Besides these resources, he had the fines of the courts, which were considerable.

Holding positions exactly the same as that of the lords were the great Abbeyes and Priories. They held of the king or their mesne lord often not by military service but in frank-almoign, i. e. promises of spiritual services such as prayers for the benefactor's soul. Abbeyes such as Barking, Glastonbury and Shaftesbury were the lords of many manors and among the largest landholders in the kingdom.

**Manorial Officials.** It is obvious that even a small manor required some administration and that large ones must have occupied many officers.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 27.

The highest officer was the **SENECHAL** or **STEWARD**, who was responsible for the governance of several manors. He represented the lord and was all-powerful, his general business being supervision.

Next came the **BAILIFF**, whose business it was to see to the lord's interest in a single manor. A thirteenth-century book gives us a picture of a busy life for him. He is to know everything connected with his bailie, to see that the ploughs do each day



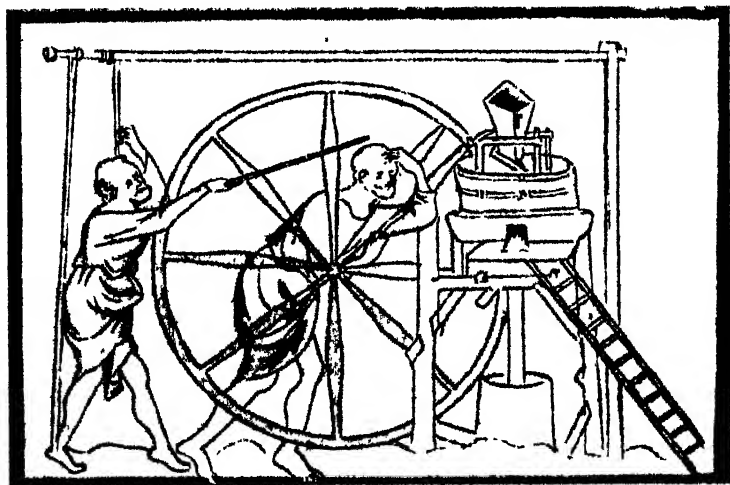
A WINDMILL

their allotted task, to have care that the ground is properly marled and manured, that the villeins duly perform their services, and that stock is cared for. He is responsible for all produce and must sell it in the nearest market.

The **REEVE** is an officer of whom we hear much—he represents the interests of the villagers and is chosen from among them. It was an unpopular office, and men paid to escape its duties. One may suspect that the unfortunate reeve was apt to be ground between the upper and nether millstones, reprimanded by his lord and abused by his fellows. Certainly the temper of Chaucer's reeve seems to have suffered in the process.

Besides these important officers we find the hayward who looked after wood and corn and meadows, the auditors who kept the accounts, and were becoming numerous as money rents were beginning to take the place of services; the ploughmen, waggoners, swineherd, and the deye or dairy maid.

One important person in the village and manorial economy must not be omitted—the miller. The mill was the lord's



A FLOUR MILL, early fourteenth century

property, often rented, and was very valuable. One of the most burdensome of the villein's obligations was to grind his corn at the lord's mill. Many cases occur of fines in the Manorial Courts for possessing private millstones. The miller was entitled to a fraction of the corn ground, and is credited in all the old ballads and stories with taking more than his share. The thirteenth-century variety probably did not differ greatly from his fourteenth-century descendant--'Wel koude he stolen corn and tollen thries.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chaucer, *Prologue*, l. 562.

**Twelfth- and Thirteenth-century Farming.** It will be well to begin by a look at an actual manor belonging to Merton College, Oxford, in 1298. There are twenty freehold tenants, four villeins, and four cotters. The freeholders hold by different tenures: one does military service for forty days and suit at the lord's court; another 'pays 5s 6d. yearly and three capons and to find a reaper for three days in harvest and to carry corn for one and a half days and carry one load annually to a neighbouring town'; others pay various sums. The villeins hold half-virgates (15 acres probably) and pay 2s. 10½d. money rent, a hen at



PRUNING AND PLANTING TREES

Christmas, ten eggs at Easter, and a goose on August 1. One of them (a woman) has to find two reapers two days of one week during harvest and in three other days to cut  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre of corn daily. In another week she is to find two reapers on Monday and one on Friday. Every fourth week from September 29 to August 1 she is to work with one other person, Saturdays and feast-days excepted. She is to help wash and shear the lord's sheep. She is to plough 6 measures of land every fourth Sunday and 1½ acres at varying times of the year. In this way the demesne was cultivated and the villeins cultivated their own fields at the same time. The four cotters were no doubt general labourers.



What did they grow, and when? In autumn the fallow field was re-ploughed, having previously been ploughed in the summer, and wheat or rye or a mixture of them known as maslin was sown; in the spring the field that last year had wheat was ploughed and sown with barley, oats, peas, or beans. Oats were not common in the midlands and south; peas and beans were used for fodder; barley was important, for the consumption of ale was enormous. Two bushels to the acre of wheat and rye seed produced 10 bushels, and 4 of oats and barley seed brought 12-16 bushels, a scanty crop to modern eyes. English wheat



MOWING

acres in the twentieth century produce usually over 30 bushels to the acre.

Was any care taken to improve the land? It was hoed and harrowed, but the harrow was primitive, wood at the best, often only a hawthorn tree weighted with logs. Clay and marl were known and used, but expensive; soot and sea-sand were added when available. Draining, except by ridging, was rare, consequently clay lands were not highly cultivated. Roots, which play a large part in modern farming, were unknown. For manure there was the refuse of the farmyard, and of sheep, unless this was appropriated entirely by the lord. Beans were dibbled, other seed sown broadcast. Weeding was done in June. When harvest came, there was a busy scene. The entire

village—men, women, and children—turned into the fields. The men reaped the wheat, cutting it high on the stalk, and were followed by women binding it into sheaves. A band of five could reap and bind 2 acres a day. Barley and oats were mown. The straw of the wheat was either reaped a second time or ploughed into the fields later. When all was gathered, the fencing was taken down and the cattle wandered over the stubble till winter forced them under cover, or, more commonly, heralded their conversion into salt beef. The threshing and winnowing was done later, the latter usually by women.



WEEDING

Each man had the produce of his own strip in the common field, though he had to use his neighbour's oxen as well as his own to plough it. Equally important with the arable land was the meadow and pasture. The meadows were permanently fenced grass land, kept for hay till the end of June. They too were in strips and each villein had his strip distributed by lot. This was, however, not always so; cases occurred where the lord kept the meadows entirely for his own use. There were also 'stinted' pastures called 'hams', hedged in, to which each villager might send a fixed number of animals, and the names sometimes suggest that small fields of this kind were granted specially to certain officials or artisans in return for their

services, e. g. Brandersham, Smithsham, Herdsham, or even Parson's Close or Parson's Acre.

Lastly came the commons, free and usually 'unstinted'—i. e. each villager could send as many animals as he pleased to graze there. It was possible for the lords to abuse this privilege.

But quite as important as land is the stock, and in the Middle Ages it was the more valuable of the two. Chief were the oxen, of which a virgater usually possessed two. The heavy plough demanded eight oxen to draw it, though four-team ploughs



REAPING

were not unknown. Oxen were preferred to horses as being steadier (any sudden jolt was bad for primitive plough-gear); they cost less to keep in winter—about one-quarter it has been estimated, and were hardier and less expensive in shoeing and harness—they were only shod on the forefeet. Lastly, the ox is 'mannes meat when dead, while horse is carrion'. 'Mannes meat' they may have been, but of a kind we should hardly appreciate now—tough and unfattened, and largely bone and gristle. At the end of June, when the hay had been cut, aged cows, worn-out oxen and toothless sheep were turned into the hay meadows and later on to the stubble, and in the autumn killed and salted for winter food. Cattle were rarely fatted,

and fresh meat was a luxury for lords and rich men. From the cows they got milk, butter, and cheese, the last usually made with skim milk. Butter was sold or salted, the butter-milk drunk. Ewes were milked as well as cows. Milk in winter was expensive and it paid to kill the calf.

Sheep have been called the sheet-anchor of farming—in the Middle Ages they were indispensable for manure and the basis of our chief export trade. Sheep-farming on a bigish scale was a venture, but a profitable one, and was much practised by the monasteries. The pig was ubiquitous and, except for



WINE-MAKING

three months in the year, self-supporting. Only the boar was really fattened for killing, and he was a Christmas feast.

Poultry were numerous and cheap; there were geese, fowls, and ducks—on big estates swans and peacocks, both regarded as luxurious eating. The dove-cote was a privilege of the lord and a pest to the farmer. The pigeons were eaten and were also valued for manure. Among the food supplies were game and rabbits, the latter possibly a recent introduction, for they were dear; in the thirteenth century three rabbits cost as much as a wether. Other village products were cider, oil from nuts, and honey. The last was important, being the only sweetener known.

Vineyards were not unknown, there are thirty-eight in Domesday Book, mostly in monasteries. It is not absolutely necessary to suppose a much greater warmth of climate, as the wine may have been more like vinegar, it was sweetened and flavoured with honey and blackberries.

It is worth while noting that the stock, live and dead, of a farm was worth much more than the land, and this fact probably made it easier for the custom of primogeniture, i.e. inheritance by the eldest son, to spread from military fiefs to socage and villein tenure. Only in Kent did the ancient custom of gavel-



SOWING CORN

kind, equal inheritance of land by all the sons, survive. But since stock and chattels were inherited by all, and since they were of much more value than the land, primogeniture was not so great an injustice, and it tended to keep the holding together. But the heir must often have found himself with too little stock for his land, and bargains and exchanges were no doubt frequent.

**Outside Supplies.** The chief things that the village had to buy from outside were, as in the eleventh century, iron, steel (which cost four times the price of iron), salt, and mill-stones. Of these last, the best came from near Paris, and we find bailiffs calling on the villeins to help cart them on the last stage of their journey. Salt was largely got by evaporating sea-water, and

a wet summer sent the price up, but some was imported from Guienne, and the brine pits of Cheshire were worked. Canvas for the sails of the wind-mills, and cloths for use in the dairy were also bought, as were brass and copper and earthenware vessels. The clothes of the villagers were spun and woven and made by the women, and only for the knights and ladies of the hall would there be purchases of better and more gorgeous cloths and silks made abroad. Wine would be imported, where the lord was a rich man. From 1280 onwards, tar became an essential to every farmer, as it was the only known remedy for scab, a disease that then appeared for the first time among the sheep.

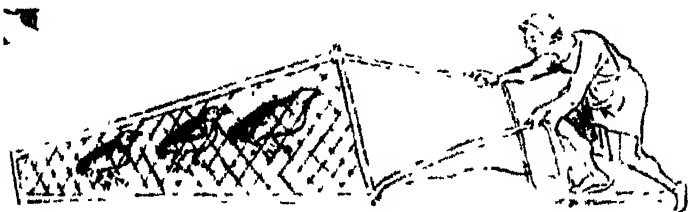


CATCHING RABBITS WITH FERRET AND NET

**Sales.** But if you buy you must also sell: no man and no community can do the one without the other. What had the village to sell? Two things mainly—hides and the wool of its sheep, in so far as it did not use it to clothe itself. As we shall see in Part III, this wool was England's main export in the Middle Ages and the basis of its commerce. It was sold at the great fairs and markets to merchants and their agents, and it was perhaps the heaviest responsibility of the bailiff to effect the sale satisfactorily.

**Women.** What share did the women take in the work of the village? First of all *when* she held land, whether as a Royal Princess the Lady of many manors, or as a cottier's heir the holder of a few poor acres, she did the services attached to them, and when these consisted of manual labour she carried them out.

There seems little difference in the early Middle Ages between man's and woman's work. We have records of women ploughing, sowing, reaping, shearing sheep, and carting, as well as taking charge of the dairy and milking cows and ewes. All kinds of farm-work, from ploughing to bird-scaring, seem to have been done by them, and carting seems to have been specially frequent. The Durham Priory accounts record payment to women for carrying water, sand, stones, faggots, and manure, and our records of the thirteenth century give us such names as Agnes the Falconer, Emma the Herdswoman, Agnes the Dairywoman, Helya the Waggoner, and Alicia and Agnes Carters. Winnowing



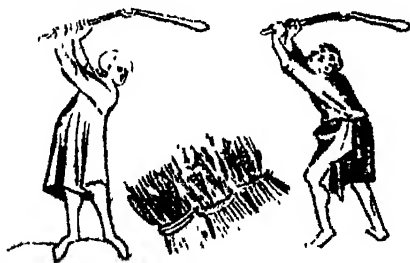
CATCHING BIRDS WITH NET

was largely the work of women. Robert Grossetête's 'Rules', addressed to a woman, the Countess of Lincoln, indicate a minute knowledge of the management of a large estate, which he expects her to possess. Most work was paid for as piece-work, and at the same rate as men; the daily wage was usually less than that of a man, but not always. Daily wages were mostly for unskilled labour, where the man's strength was worth more. Besides their share in the farm work, women made all the clothes right from the raw wool, washing and combing the fleece, spinning, weaving and dyeing, as well as the final cutting out and making.

**Material Position of the Peasant.** The difficult question arises, Was the peasant better or worse off, relatively to the standard of the age, than he is to-day or was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? The virgater, whom we may call a small farmer, probably lived in a state of rude plenty as far as food was

concerned. It was coarse, but he had enough. The cotters too, from which class come the wage labourers, probably were well above the starvation line. The ordinary wage was  $2d.$  a day, for women  $1d.$  a day, and for boys  $\frac{1}{2}d.$ , but the bulk of the work was piece-work. It has been estimated that a peasant, holding 20 acres of arable land with his rights of pasture and meadow, would make about £3 to £4 profit per annum, and his expenditure would be about £3, leaving a net saving of 10s. to £1 a year, which he could utilize to buy up his feudal obligations or ad-

vance his children in the world.



THRESHING CORN WITH FLAILS

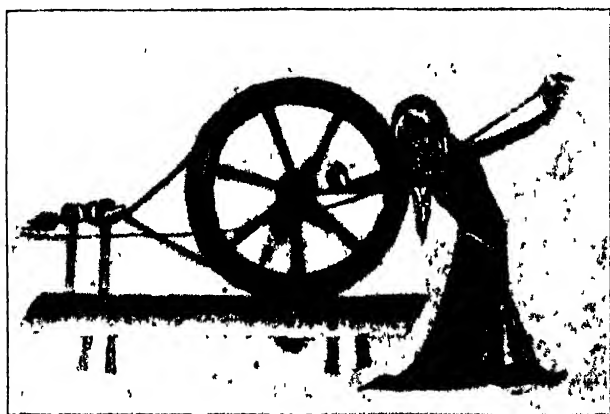
The standard of living was low, especially in matter of housing; but probably a smaller proportion of the population was underfed than nowadays. Wages were highest near the towns and manufacturing districts, i. e. near

London and in East Anglia. Artisans were better paid, a good carpenter got  $3\frac{1}{2}d.$  a day, but outside the towns they were not numerous. Holidays were few, if Walter of Henley is to be trusted. Writing in the thirteenth century, he estimates 308 working days per year. Sunday was usually but not universally a holiday. So much for labour; what capital was needed? It has been estimated as roughly £1 an acre, three times as much as the value of the land. This was much higher relatively than the £6 of the eighteenth or the £12 of the nineteenth centuries. Except where the lord supplied stock and implements, the villein and even the cottager was in a sense a man of substance. The employment of such considerable capital, as large estates demanded, required the keeping of accounts, and the bailiffs' account rolls of the thirteenth century show great minuteness and accuracy. They were carefully audited by clerks paid by the job, so there must have been



a considerable number of these travelling from manor to manor. The fact that their pay is poor and compares badly with that of an artisan suggests that there were plenty of them, and that the thirteenth century was not so illiterate as has sometimes been supposed.

**Manorial Courts.** A word or two must be said on the legal arrangements of these communities. Every manor had its court, and it is from their records that much of our knowledge is drawn. At these courts all the civil affairs of the manor were



ROPE-MAKING

decided, holdings passed to the heir or changed hands, the fines and reliefs were paid, the services by which the land was held recorded. Tenants were kept up to their duties and fined for neglecting them. The fines were part of the lord's revenue. The judgments were decreed by the assembled tenants, according to the custom of the manor.

The lord, however, might have criminal jurisdiction, in which case he held a court twice a year, which superseded the Hundred Court. Here all lesser crimes were judged and punished, the profits in fines going to the lord. View of Frankpledge was taken, by which each man was responsible for the showing up and

surrender of criminals. The maintenance of roads and bridges was also secured in these courts. Some villages bought from the lord the right to hold their own courts, and this becomes interesting in connexion with the growth of towns.

**Summary.** 1. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw all England subject to the manorial system, the basis of which was the villein, an unfree peasant holding land by labour services



RUSTICS OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

at the will of the lord. But in the thirteenth century the system is already showing signs of decline.

2. The village was still almost self-sufficing, providing itself with food and clothes. Luxuries for the lord, and a few essentials such as iron, came from outside.

3. The material condition of the peasant was not one of actual suffering. He had enough to eat and to wear, shelter of a kind, and he could and did save money by which he could improve his status. He worked hard, but he did not starve, and unemploy-

ment was rare. Liberty, in the modern sense, no man of any rank possessed

4. The manorial courts made the manor a completely enclosed unit ; justice and fair play among its members were thus secured within its own boundaries, and custom regulated even the tyranny of the lord.

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## 2. Growth of the Towns. Rise of the Gilds

IN the last chapter we followed a movement away from freedom and diversity towards a system of interdependence, control, and even tyranny. Rural England became feudalized as we call it, organized into a state in which each man's place was rigidly defined from birth. He was protected certainly by custom from outrageous tyranny, but neither he himself nor his property was absolutely his own. Freedom no man knew. But at the very moment that this system reached its highest perfection in the country, a movement in exactly the opposite direction grew rapidly in the towns. We have seen that in the eleventh century there were some hundred or so towns, many of the inhabitants of which did not earn their living by agriculture, nor hold their land and houses by ordinary labour rents. In the twelfth century instead of these differences disappearing and the townspeople becoming organized on a more strict manorial principle, as happened in the country, exactly the reverse took place. With peace and order had come prosperity, men had surplus produce to dispose of, markets grew apace, and it became increasingly possible for men to live, not by producing all they ate and more, but by specializing in some industry and exchanging the product of their handicraft for the surplus food produced by others. Such men naturally congregated where others came, i. e. in markets or small towns. The cottar class and the younger sons of villeins and freemen often found such a means of livelihood more to their taste than that of a day labourer on the lord's demesne, and at present the lord

had no great objection to giving them leave to go. So the towns grew and trade and industry increased.

But it must not be forgotten that even in the so-called boroughs the feudal system ruled, though the inhabitants of one borough might have many separate lords. In market towns that formed part of a manor the feudal services were exacted to the full.

**Disabilities of the Townsfolk.** Let us look for a moment at the chief disabilities under which the townsfolk suffered by being bound by a system devised for a rural community. (*a*) Military service to the lord at any time; (*b*) suit in the lord's court; (*c*) the non-admission of new burgesses without the lord's consent, and the town wanted new members both to share taxes and to increase trade; (*d*) the necessity for the lord's consent to the re-marriage of widows; (*e*) the exaction by the lord of tolls on all things sold in the market and the consequent hindering of trade; (*f*) the obligation to grind corn at the lord's mill and bake in his oven, serious burdens in a rural manor, but in a town intolerable.

THE LORD OF THE MANOR, however, was not the only oppressor of the poor townsman, worse still was the KING'S SHERIFF of the county. He usually farmed the county taxes from the king, i. e. he paid the king a fixed sum and recouped himself as best he could. Human nature proved weak and his exactions became a byword; the best-hated man of the early Middle Ages was the sheriff, as ballads and tales show clearly—it is not by chance that Robin Hood, the popular hero, fought the sheriff of Nottingham, rather than any other tyrant of the day. The sheriff was tax-gatherer, but he was also recruiting officer, and still more important, chief judge in the local courts. In all these capacities he seems to have required bribes either to do his work or to neglect it, according to the desires of the suppliant, and when other supplies failed he did not stick at open outrage, as when at Canterbury he broke down the only bridge into the town and forced all travellers to use, and pay for, his ferry.

A third and by no means negligible tyrant was the CLERK OF

THE KING'S MARKETS, who appeared at pleasure to examine and stamp the public weights and measures, and, if he did no worse than demand horses to carry him and his men to the next town, the burgesses felt grateful to a kindly fate

Such being the state of insecurity in which the townsmen lived, it is not surprising to find them combining to secure for themselves the control of those things, on account of which lord, sheriff, or other king's official claimed the right to interfere

**Privileges secured by the Towns.** Henry I set the example



A BAKEHOUSE

of granting to burgesses on demesne lands the right to rule and tax themselves, and the twelfth century saw a large number of charters given to the towns, for Henry II for some years followed his grandfather's course, and John has been called the charter-monger.

What were the privileges the towns secured ?

- (a) First and foremost they got rid of the sheriff
  - (i) by farming their own taxes, and
  - (ii) by having their own courts.

The first of these is known as the *firma burgi*, by which they paid a fixed sum to the king and then taxed themselves to meet it. The second they secured by substituting the *borough court*

for the hundred court and ensuring that no burgess should be called to the latter.

(iii) The third exaction by the sheriff was got rid of by an undertaking to provide a fixed contingent for military service.

(b) Equally important was it to secure the election of their own officials and the elected mayor appears early in the charters.

(c) They claimed too the right to control the market and secure for the townsmen the monopoly of trade to the exclusion of 'foreigners', i. e. men from other towns. This claim often took the form of a demand for a Merchant Gild, of which more will be said later.

(d) and (e). Two other liberties were sometimes but not always secured, viz. freedom for the citizens from tolls in other towns throughout the kingdom, and liberty for villeins who settled in the town. This last was fairly common and secured for the villein, who resided in the town unchallenged for a year and a day, safety from his lord, if claimed later. It was an important right, for it ensured a stream of recruits for the town. In the fourteenth century we shall see how it increased the difficulties of the lords when labour became scarce after the Black Death.

These privileges were usually secured by charters from the king, often at first for a short period like ten years, and only later granted in fee farm, i. e. in perpetuity. Even then there was a certain insecurity, for the king might resume control, or repudiate the grant of his predecessor. Consequently we find burgesses paying heavy sums to get their charters renewed at the beginning of a reign.

**Progress of various Classes of Towns.** The towns of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries may be divided into three classes, viz. those on the royal demesne, those on the estate of a lay baron, those whose overlords were bishops or abbots.

(a) **TOWNS ON THE ROYAL DEMESNE.** All tenants of the 'ancient demesne', i. e. the royal manors that William I took over from Edward the Confessor, held certain definite privileges. Even the villeinage on these lands was freer and more independent, and it was therefore natural that the towns which

earliest secured privileges were royal property. Such were York, Winchester, Norwich, Southampton, Nottingham, and Gloucester. It was easier for the king to grant favours, they cost him less. He wanted his taxes and his soldiers, but it was a matter of indifference through whom he got them. If the bailiff of the town undertook to see he got them, the king was just as pleased as if the official were the sheriff, better pleased indeed, for strong Norman kings had no fancy for powerful local magnates and were glad to lessen their influence. As to courts of justice, while the baronial and ecclesiastical lords clung to their private courts as the chief source of their power, the king, the fountain of justice itself, just now, too, busy devising schemes to draw all causes into his own royal courts, was careless if the borough inhabitants wanted to settle their own lawsuits. At any moment he could call suits up to his own courts at pleasure. But the borough court was the centre of civic life and all important to the citizens, for by its control they managed to regulate trade and industry to their liking—matters which at this time concerned the king but little. As to the royal officials, the Clerk of the Market, &c., if the burgesses chose to do the work it saved the king the salaries of a lot of civil servants and the burghers were willing to pay for the privilege. So the towns on the royal demesne found no insuperable difficulty in securing self-government, and almost all the prosperous towns and bigger cities were on royal soil.

(b) TOWNS ON THE ESTATES OF LAY LORDS. Such were Berkeley and Leicester, while others granted to a noble by the king, like Barnstaple and Liverpool, were in much the same position. These had a more difficult task. It was to the interest of the lords to keep to their rights, and the burgesses had little to offer in exchange. But a long succession of powerful Norman and Plantagenet kings prevented the baronage from gaining the overwhelming position of privilege they secured in France, and war both civil and foreign weakened their numbers and exhausted their treasuries. The town kept up a perpetual policy of asking for more ; unlike a family, it neither died out for want of heirs

nor weakened by individual disaster. In the long run the lay lord was no match for the community ; every time of poverty and embarrassment was eagerly seized to exact fresh privileges and by the end of the Middle Ages most of such towns were free. But that time was not yet, and the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw only the beginning of the struggle.

(c) **TOWNS ON ECCLESIASTICAL ESTATES.** But for the towns on the lands of the church no such victory waited. In Lynn and Wells, in St. Albans and Bury St. Edmunds the advantages of an undying community were matched by an equally undying corporation, backed by all the material and spiritual powers of a universal church. Abbots and bishops held to every jot and tittle of feudal power, would indeed have thought they were betraying their order to have done otherwise, and for the most part scrupled not to use spiritual weapons if earthly ones failed. The towns kept up the fight bravely, but in vain—the end of the Middle Ages saw them still in feudal toils, and Lynn was fighting in 1520 for the control of its courts, a privilege secured to Norwich 300 years before. It is probable that the hatred of the sixteenth century for the whole monastic system had quite as much to do with its feudal tyranny as with disgust at its morals or hatred of its superstition. The fight, however, was not without its value. It was in the towns that men learnt to work together for a common cause, to face defeat after defeat in the name of freedom, and, when the time came for the nation to rise as one to demand the right to govern itself, it was the towns that led the revolt and whose experience on a smaller scale had created the tradition and the habit that taught them the way to victory.

**Organization of the Borough.** A borough was ruled usually by a bailiff (later called a mayor) and a body of twelve as council. Generally there was another body of twenty-four used for consultation or consent. Ordinances were drawn up by the twelve and presented to the burgesses for their consent, at least that seems to have been the practice in early days. They were then sealed with the Common Seal. On the whole in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the number of burgesses was



small, the rule was popular and the commonalty carried weight. There were no great differences of wealth, numbers were not unmanageable and most people took their share in the government.

**Difficulties that survived.** Even in boroughs that had secured the privileges enumerated above difficulties survived. They came chiefly from the survival of special jurisdictions. For example, in Winchester in the heart of the city was a certain Manor of Godbeate belonging to the Abbey of St. Swithin's, to whose Abbot was added the further honour of being Bishop of Winchester, and over this manor the mayor and town authorities had no control. Not even the king's writ ran there. Naturally it became the haunt of every outlaw and vagabond of the town, whose right of sanctuary was rigidly maintained by the monks. Even two of the city gates were in the hands of the bishop. Exeter too had such a precinct, where the monks claimed freedom from arrest for all, and also freedom from taxes and dues, military service, and help to repair the walls that guarded them. In Bristol the whole ward of Redcliffe belonged to the Lord of Berkeley, and its inhabitants refused all control except their lord's. The Berkeleys claimed the river, held their own courts and prison, their own markets and fair, and refused the mayor's Assize of Bread and Ale even though he was the king's marshal. In the twelfth century Worcester, a town of 2,000 inhabitants, had five gallows belonging to as many different lords. The castles also that overawed the cities were in the king's control, but here, too, the royal hand was lighter and most of them were demolished at an early date, except where military considerations made their existence imperative.

**Regulation of Trade by the Towns.** It will be well here to try to get some idea of what a thirteenth-century citizen regarded as the proper function of the authorities in regulating trade. In the first place, it was a fixed idea that the trader and the manufacturer existed for the benefit of the consumer, and when interests clashed it was the consumer who must be considered. The welfare of all was more important than the success of the few.

Hence the community had the right to control the actions of all who offered to supply its needs.

The first essential being ample and pure food, every town had its Assize of Bread and Ale, which decreed the quality of the wares, the measures by which they might be sold, and even the price. So important was this deemed that in 1266 the central government issued an act enforcing the local assizes and fixing a general price. For in the Middle Ages men thought that there was a 'just price' for all things, a price such that all who contributed to produce the article could make thereby an honest living suitable to his station, no more, no less. They refused to recognize the law of supply and demand as a reason for rising prices; the fact that you could get people to pay more in times of scarcity did not justify you in doing so. Therefore there were no commercial crimes equal in their eyes to those of the forestaller and regrator. Cheating was a minor offence; all traders, especially men of the victualling trades, were liable to cheat, and elaborate checking and supervision were enacted to prevent it. But to try to corner (or forestall) the market by buying supplies before they reached it, or by purchasing (or regrating) large quantities to re-sell at a higher price, was the last stage of commercial immorality. The men of the thirteenth century had no use for the middleman, even the merchant of foreign goods was only justified in making a living—he might not make what was possible, only what was fair. Listen to the good citizens of Bristol on the forestaller: 'A manifest oppressor of the poor and a public enemy of the whole commonalty and country, who hastens to buy before others, grain, fish, herrings, or anything vendible whatsoever, coming by land or water . . . making gain, oppressing his poorer and despising his richer neighbours, and who designs to sell more dearly what he so unjustly acquired . . . and so by fraudulent art or craft he misleads town and country.'<sup>1</sup> As a modern writer puts it, 'The economist of that period had not grasped the fact that cleverness shown in buying an article cheap and selling the same thing, without any further

<sup>1</sup> *The Little Red Book of Bristol*, ii. 220.

expenditure of labour, dear, if done on a sufficiently large scale, justifies the bestowal of the honour of knighthood or a peerage.'<sup>1</sup>

It must be remembered that, at the time of which we are now speaking, control was comparatively easy, for towns were small and the officials could really supervise. That where trade was on a larger scale matters might prove more difficult is shown by the effect of bad harvests on London, where the mayors in the next century were forced to establish municipal granaries and even to import corn from Prussia, since storing of grain with a view to a better market was forbidden the ordinary trader.

**Mediaeval Trade inter-municipal.** Another peculiarity of trade in the Middle Ages was the way each town was a sort of small nation. The Englishman's attitude to the alien has always been rather insular, but in the age we are speaking of this attitude belonged also to the citizen of one town towards the 'foreigner' of another. It excites a smile now if we hear a Devon farmer talking of 'vurriners vrom Zumerset', but it was correct English and accurate fact in the mouth of a mediaeval townsman. The man of Bristol had no more right in the town of Gloucester than the man of Rouen or Ypres, and municipal authorities arranged mutual favours with towns not 50 miles away as if they were sovereign states. Nay more, we find English towns calling upon continental ones to compel reparation to be made by their defaulting citizens, or threatening reprisals, without reference to king or parliament. This is a most important point to remember when we try to make general statements about English towns.

**The Merchant Gild.** Side by side with the rise of the municipality, sometimes preceding it, sometimes created by the town's charter, rose an organization known as the Merchant Gild. Probably most towns had such a gild, though London is a notable exception. The first certain case mentioned is the Merchant Gild of Burford, shortly before 1100. This gild was an association of all those who bought and sold in the town, and its object was to ensure two things, a fair price to the consumer and a fair

<sup>1</sup> Salzmann, *English Industries of the Middle Ages*, p. 209.

reward to the seller. We have seen<sup>1</sup> that mediaeval ideas of trade and commercial morality differed greatly from ours in the twentieth century, and to secure practices in accordance with these ideas was the work of the Merchant Gild. Its methods were:

(a) The creation of a monopoly of trading for its members within the town and for some distance beyond its walls. Non-gildsmen were allowed, on payment of toll, to sell wholesale, provided they sold only to gildsmen. Thus all retail trade was in the hands of the gild, competition and underselling were eliminated, and, it was supposed, a 'just price' was reached.

(b) To prevent forestalling and regrating, all buying and selling were to be done openly, and any gildsman could claim a share in a bargain made by one of his fellows. Hence no individual could attempt to 'corner' or 'rig' the market; the only danger might be if the whole gild tried to do so. But in a small community this would easily be detected and foiled.

(c) The gildsmen also made common bargains as a gild and shared the profits.

(d) The gild was an association for mutual protection and help. A gildsman who was imprisoned in another town was demanded and even fetched by the authority of the gild. But such action carried also responsibilities and the gild often had to accept liability for its members' debts. For the custom of mediaeval towns, if a 'foreign' merchant left the town in debt, was to distrain on any member of the same town who happened to come that way. He in turn claimed compensation from the real debtor and his gild forced the debtor to pay. But such a custom hampered trade and Edward I made a determined effort to override it. It is doubtful if he succeeded, for the mediaeval burgess was apt to claim that borough custom took precedence of statute law. However, the boroughs often made mutual treaties adjusting the matter.

(e) Lastly, the gild was an insurance society against sickness and poverty, and fulfilled its function well. Sick members were visited, supplied with necessities, and, if poor, buried handsomely

<sup>1</sup> See p. 58.

at the cost of the gild. Members, who fell on poverty undeservedly, were helped to find their feet again and tided over to more prosperous times.

Some merchant gilds claimed freedom from toll throughout the land, as did some boroughs like London. Such freedom must have gone far to break down the monopoly of the various merchant gilds at an early date, especially in the larger towns. Tolls and customs hamper trade, all such exemptions helped to increase it.

**Organization of the Gild and its connexion with the Municipality.**

1. The gild and the municipality were not the same body, though they must have had many members in common. The burgess was not necessarily a trader and consequently not always a gildsman. The population of an early borough was largely agricultural, and a man might hold land and pay dues on it and so be a burgess without having any claim as a trader to be a member of the gild. On the other hand, a man who traded did not necessarily hold land, and so, though a member of the gild, might not be a burgess. Gilds, too, often included men living outside the town, who thus secured the right to trade. Among these were often abbots, monks, and lay lords. Both the gild and the burgess body included women. Lastly, in the town there were people who were neither burgesses nor gildsmen.

2. The town and the gild had different forms of government. The town, as we have seen, was ruled by a mayor or bailiff and a council of twelve. The gild was governed by an alderman and two or four colleagues. Each organization had its separate laws and separate purse, and we find the gild lending money to the mayor and commune of the borough.

3. The gild controlled trade and arbitrated among its members, but such arbitration did not always prevent dissatisfied gildsmen taking the case to the borough courts if they pleased, for the borough not the gild was the authority for law and police, and had civil and criminal jurisdiction.

Such was the condition in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but as trade grew the members of the Merchant Gild became more

and more identical with the burgesses, and from the fourteenth century the gild tends to lose itself either in the town community or, as we shall see presently, in the aggregate of the craft gilds.

Entrance to the Merchant Gild was by fee, but there were numerous exceptions. Eldest sons and heiresses were often admitted free, younger sons on payment of a smaller fee than outsiders. Heiresses could exercise their rights themselves or, in many gilds, transfer them to their husbands or sons.

**Craft Gilds.** Within fifty years of the formation of the Merchant Gild another form of association appears. Imagine for a moment a growing town in the twelfth century. It had, perhaps, some 3,000 inhabitants, about 500 households, with say 200 members of the Merchant Gild. These members included all who bought and sold within the borough, and very many of these would make the things they sold as well. But they would not always sell to the general public. Some would make things that were used to make something else; the lorimers, for example, who made the iron parts of a saddle, would sell them to the saddlers, who would make the finished article.

Tanners, too, would sell their leather to shoemakers and cobblers and all the various workers in leather. Now each of these groups of workers had its own special problems and special interests. What more likely, in an age when associations were in the air, than that each craft should tend to unite its members for common objects? Sometimes such association might begin as a burial club, or with the object of keeping lights at a certain shrine, but, since workers in a craft tended naturally to keep together, each association came to consist of men of a single craft. And once together what easier than to talk 'shop', to grumble at the ill-practices of men of another craft, and to combine for mutual protection and help? In some such way arose the Craft Gilds, late in the twelfth century. The earliest was the weavers', who formed gilds in various towns and bought from the king the right to exist. In London the fishmongers did the same. The weavers' gilds in these early days were at war with the burgesses, for they refused to become members of the borough

or to share its burdens. Their position is peculiar, and there seems some likelihood that they were aliens, but there is no absolute evidence. In any case, by the thirteenth century craft guilds were numerous and widely spread, and their members were burgesses and often also members of the Merchant Guild.

**Objects of the Craft Guilds.** The objects of these craft guilds were much the same as those of the merchant guild :

(a) They aimed at a monopoly of the industry. All men of the craft in that town were members of the guild.

(b) They desired control of their members for the double purpose of a fair living to the worker and a good standard of craftsmanship. They tried also to fix prices, but as this might savour of attempts to control the market against the consumer, it could only be done indirectly and secretly. They did, however, fix wages. The principle of good workmanship was genuinely desired and everything was done to secure the reputation of the guild in this respect. The doctrine of 'caveat emptor' is of modern growth and would have been repudiated by any respectable body of craftsmen, however much individuals tried to cheat.

(c) Mutual help in sickness and poverty was an essential part of their organization.

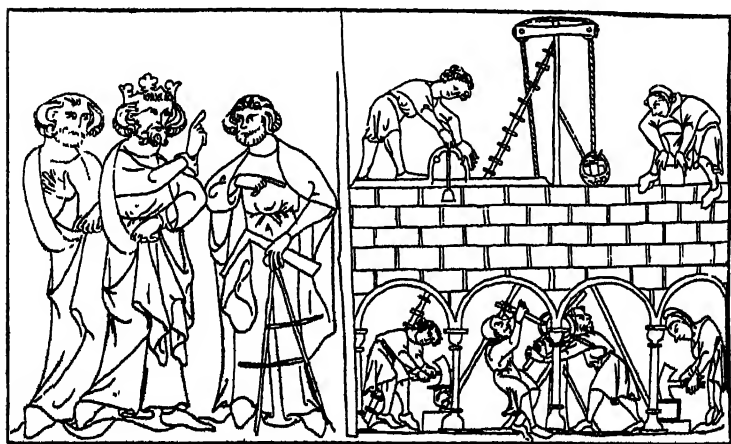
(d) The religious functions of the guilds were important. They were regarded as essential and strictly observed. Later on, many guilds supported shrines and priests to serve them, and gave generously to the pious object of prayers for the souls of deceased members. Connected with the religious side of the organization was the custom of arranging pageants and plays for the delight and edification of the townsfolk. The 'mystery' plays became a heavy charge in later days and reacted on the internal organization of the guilds.<sup>1</sup>

**Methods and Customs of the Craft Guilds.** Of the methods adopted by the guilds to secure these objects the following were the chief :

(a) **APPRENTICESHIP.** The ordinary way by which the crafts were recruited was by the employment of apprentices. A boy

<sup>1</sup> See p. 132.

or girl who wished to become a hatter or a fishmonger or a weaver would apply to a member of the gild to become his or her apprentice. He bound himself, or his parents bound him, for a period of time varying from four to ten years (the most common period was seven years), to work for and live with the master craftsman, obeying him in all things, learning from him the trade and, except during the last year or so, receiving no wage. In return for his seven or more years' work his master undertook to feed,



BUILDING OPERATIONS IN THE REIGN OF HENRY III

house, and clothe him, to teach him his trade, so that at the end of his apprenticeship he should be thoroughly equipped as a craftsman. He was to have training in all matters, and his master was responsible for his good conduct and might chastise him within reason. If the master did not fulfil his promises, or abused his position tyrannically, the apprentice could complain to the wardens of the craft, and on the third complaint he was transferred to another master. The system was one that turned out not merely skilled workmen, but men trained in ideas of civic solidarity, proud of their craft, proud of their city, and ready in their turn to shoulder the responsibility and bear the burdens



that secured to the city its trade and its independence. In later times it was customary that no one could become a burgess except by way of apprenticeship and membership of a craft gild.

(b) SUPERVISION. The second plan for securing good quality work was that of a strict supervision. Each craft gild had its appointed overseers, whose business it was to examine carefully all goods made, to denounce clumsy or fraudulent work and bring offenders before the court of the gild. Mediaeval morality disapproved of sharp practices in trading; as we have seen, it

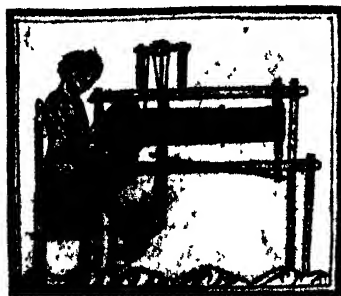


A DISPENSARY

did not expect the buyer to look out for himself, or consider that one code of morals did for ordinary life and another for trading. 'Business is business' would seem to it a cynical and unchristian maxim. Still men's practices often fall below their code and the craftsman of the thirteenth century was too often veritably a man of craft. We find penalties inflicted for such tricks as 'putting better wares at the top than below, moistening groceries to make them heavier, selling second-hand furs for new, soldering together broken swords, selling sheep leather for doe leather'.<sup>1</sup> The ale-wife, who thickened the bottom of her

<sup>1</sup> Ashley, *Economic History*, i. 90.

quart measure with pitch covered with rosemary, and the baker, who had a boy under the kneading-board to abstract through a hole part of his customers' dough under their very eyes, were perhaps unusually audacious and ingenious, but fraud was evidently frequent though the methods were crude. Night work was prohibited, partly to make supervision easier, partly to prevent the ill effects of working by insufficient light. Looms were ordered to be placed in rooms opening on the street, where all could see the work being done. Makers of 'false work' were fined in the courts, half the fine going to the gild and half



A. LOOM

to the town. Except in London, no man might work at more than one craft, and in most towns shops and market stalls were so arranged that all the men of one industry were together. Hence we get such names as Bread Street, Corn Street, Wine Street, Fleshmarket, and Tanners' Row. This segregation made supervision easier; it also prevented

unfair undercutting of prices or attempts to take advantage of one's fellows in any way.

(c) MEMBERSHIP OF THE GILD WAS COMPULSORY on all members of the craft in the town, and ordinances were passed against any attempt to make or sell goods by non-members. This was, of course, necessary if supervision was to be effective.

(d) MEMBERS of the gild were bound NOT TO GO TO LAW AGAINST EACH OTHER, at any rate until they had submitted the matter to the arbitration of the gild. This did not mean that the gild had a court with jurisdiction outside the borough court. London weavers and fishmongers did claim to have such a court and it took the citizens of London a long time to get rid of this claim, but as a rule the gild merely arbitrated, and had no legal power to enforce its decision.

(e) THE GILD, it must always be remembered, was a FELLOW-

SHIP, and members were expected not to rival but to help each other. For instance, one ordinance runs that if a member found he could not finish a contracted job in time, he was to call in other members to help, so that the work should not be lost. Members also in later times bound themselves not to lure away journey-men or servants from fellow members.

(f) Sometimes when the gild regulations could not be enforced by law, owing to the opposition of the mayor and the town, the gild secured the obedience of its members by exacting an OATH OF OBEDIENCE from all and suing any recalcitrant member afterwards for breach of oath in a spiritual i.e. an ecclesiastical court.

**Organization of the Craft Gilds.** The gilds were governed by a warden and an assembly. Originally they were democratic in structure, naturally so when their numbers were small. Later, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the power passed into the hands of a small body of wealthy members.

**Relation with the Municipality.** In the early days there is no doubt the town as a whole objected to the craft gilds. The early gilds of weavers seem to have been composed of non-burgesses, who held licence from the Crown to exist. It is possible they were aliens. The London fishmongers, too, stood outside the city organization and held their own court or Halimote. These were the very earliest craft gilds; but even when they became general the town authorities still fought them. The point at issue was the supremacy of the town magistrates over *all* its citizens. After fights of varying intensities in different towns we find the municipality the victor, and the craft ordinances were submitted to the magistrates for approval.

Having established their authority, the mayor and his council used the gilds as supervisors and controllers of the trades, making them part of the city organization. Unfortunately in later centuries, especially in the fifteenth and sixteenth, the wealthy members of the craft gilds learnt how to manage the town government by using the power of the craft to gain the town offices for themselves, and they learnt also to use these offices in

their own interest and not that of the community. But in the thirteenth century we have not reached that degenerate stage.

**Effect of the Craft Gilds on the Municipality.** There was one effect of the craft gilds that must not be passed over ; it was this. Originally the townsmen were mostly landowners ; the town authorities were elected by the burgesses, who held houses and lands in and around the town. As the craft gilds grew, the wealth was gradually transferred from the landholder to the successful craftsman and the towns came to be ruled by them. Thus an interest grew up that was different from, and often opposed to, the landed interest. In the Middle Ages this new commercial and industrial interest only affected the policy of the towns themselves ; we shall see how later it affected that of the nation.

**Comparison of Craft Gilds with Trade Unions.** The question naturally arises, 'In what did these craft gilds resemble the modern Trade Union?' The latter is a union of wage-earners having for its main object the maintenance and raising of the standard of living and the conditions of work of its members. It demands the right to negotiate with the employer for the trade as a whole and so to prevent exploitation of individuals. Its members may consist of men of the same craft, or they may be men of different crafts but all employed by the same set of capitalists. Of the former kind would be a union made up of engineers from all sorts of industries, of the latter such a body as a union of railway servants including every kind of salaried employé, fireman, engine-driver, signalman, cleaner, porter, guard, station-master, clerk, and, in theory at least, heads of departments and managers.

The differences between these modern unions and the craft gilds are more striking than their similarity. Both, it is true, aimed at maintaining 'the standard of life', i. e. both desired that the worker should secure a fair return for his labour and should keep his way of living up to a certain level of food, clothing, and shelter. Both concerned themselves with hours of work and even with wages, but here the resemblance ends. The chief differences are these :

1. The trade union consists only of wage-earners, the craft gild consisted of a few journeymen or wage-earners, and a preponderating mass of masters, men who sold the wares they produced. Industry was not yet divided into the master who organized the manufacture and the wage-earner who merely made the article or part of it. In the early days all the workers in the craft were members of the gild and all were skilled workmen. Master, apprentice and journeyman had much the same interests and were of the same social class.

2. The trade union draws its members from men of the same trade all over the country. The gild only included the workers of one town or district.

3. The craft gild was 'blackleg' proof, membership was compulsory. A trade union can only win members by persuasion, and many thousands of the trade do not join. The craft gild was consequently in a much stronger position.

4. The trade union is concerned entirely with the interest of its members, the wage-earners. It has no concern for the general public, and as a rule takes no cognizance of the quality of the work done by its members. It is merely a fighting machine to secure possible working conditions. The craft gild took care of the quality of its work, enforced it by supervision, and ensured a succession of skilled workmen by the system of apprenticeship.

5. The craft gilds were public bodies, recognized and used by the authorities, under whose control they were supposed to act. Trade unions are at present only unofficially recognized by governments, though recent events show a tendency towards state-recognition. It is not so very long ago that they were illegal societies.

**Value of Craft Gilds.** There is no doubt that in their early days the craft gilds were very valuable bodies, performing functions of the greatest use. The system of apprenticeship was as perfect a scheme of technical education, suited to the age, as could be wished. The part inadequately played in modern life by Friendly Societies and National Insurance Acts was excellently provided for and carried out by their ordinances, and the ideal of honest

work and fair pay was a high one. Like all human schemes it held in itself the seeds of decay, and with the getting of riches and the increasing complexity of commercial life the rules and customs, that did so well in the thirteenth century, proved inadequate to bind the greed and ambition of men. That time, however, is yet to come and in 1300 we may leave the English town still on the upward grade of prosperity, with no more sick and poor than it could deal with, with unemployment almost unknown, with few social differences, happily occupied in extending its freedom or organizing its own life.

**Social Gilds.** A word or two on the social and religious gilds may not be out of place, since they took the part of modern friendly societies, insurance societies, and burial clubs. They were very widespread and their members included men and women of every rank of society. Regular payments were made and the money used to support sick and unfortunate members who, thus provided for, did not become a charge on the State. Women paid the same fees and received the same benefits as men. These gilds and the monasteries, with some help from the municipality, provided, between them, for most of the incapables and unemployed of the realm, and it was not till the break up of both at the Reformation that the State found itself faced, on any large scale, with the problem of maintaining those unable to provide for themselves.

**Chief Industries of the Thirteenth Century.** The chief industries of this period, with the great exception of the woollen manufacture and trade, which will be dealt with later, were as follows :

1. **COAL**, taken chiefly from surface or outcrop workings. There was little deep mining as yet. The centres were Northumberland, Forest of Dean, Shropshire, Derbyshire, and Nottingham. That the quantity used was not inconsiderable is shown by the fact that in 1257 Queen Eleanor was driven from Nottingham by the unpleasant fumes of so many coal fires.

2. **IRON** was smelted chiefly in the Forest of Dean. No method was yet known of using coal for the furnaces, so a near and plentiful supply of wood was necessary. The method used

was primitive. Layers of alternate ore and charcoal were built in a sort of cone and an outer case of clay or stone built over it. A draught-hole for the wind was left and sometimes a foot-bellows was used. The molten iron sank to the bottom and was drawn off into a gutter of sand made with small branching gutters, known respectively as the sow and pigs. Iron thus made was hammered and worked up in the smithy. The destruction of forests was great, the ironworks of Tintern using 600 large trees per year. Of the smaller articles made from iron we find knives at Maxstead, needles at Wilton, and razors at Leicester.

3. LEAD was mined in Derbyshire, the Mendips, Cumberland, and Devon. As early as 1295 a water mill was used to make the draught. Lead miners enjoyed special privileges as to law courts and taxation, and like tin-workers they might prospect anywhere for new veins of ore. Silver was refined from the lead.

4. TIN-workers, too, were a very special body of men, and the tin trade held privileges from time beyond memory. The mines were in Devon and Cornwall, and the works were mostly in the deposits made by the washing down of ore by the rivers. It was the earliest of our industries to fall into the hands of capitalists, for all tin had to be stamped by government officials and, as this was done only twice a year, a certain amount of capital was necessary to carry on while stores accumulated. Thus we find the wage-system existing among the tanners even in the thirteenth century. But the political position of these miners was unique. The 'stannary' worker (or tin-man) paid taxes not as an Englishman but as a miner. He lived, not by common law, but by miner's law, his courts were miner's courts, his parliament the miner's parliament. He was a freeman and no villein, he could prospect anywhere in the two counties and claim his find, subject to a tax to the lord. He could divert streams and force people to sell him fuel. The parliament of the stannaries legislated and had the power to veto any national legislation that infringed their privileges. These privileges existed in early times and were definitely confirmed in 1201.

5. STONE QUARRYING. Owing to difficulties of transit, stone

was got as near the place of building as possible or from places from which it could be brought by water. There were, however, a few noted quarries for building stone such as Beer in Devon, Box for Bath stone, Corfe of which the stone was used for Westminster Abbey, and Portland for Exeter Cathedral. Purbeck marble, of which much of Salisbury Cathedral is built, became fashionable at the end of the twelfth century; it was quarried and shaped in the neighbourhood of Corfe. Quarrying was paid at the rate of unskilled labour, for in 1296 the men got  $1\frac{1}{2}d.$  to  $2d.$  a day, and the women  $1d.$  for carrying.

6. METAL workers included besides the smiths, goldsmiths, bell-founders and pewterers.

7. LEATHER-WORKING was extensive. There were two classes of workers, the cordwainers or shoemakers, and the cobblers. Neither might entrench on the other's trade. The problem of when is a shoe not a shoe, or how much mending constituted a new shoe, was sometimes a nice one. There were several other leather-working trades such as the girdlers, the makers of purses, wallets, bottles, &c.

8. BUILDING was not a single industry, as now. If you started to build you did your own contracting, hiring your masons, your tilers, your glaziers, your workers in wrought iron and in marble, your woodcarvers and carpenters, buying your own material. Consequently building was amazingly cheap. The absence of the middleman enabled the mediæval church-builder to fulfil his pious intention at a cost that the modern public benefactor can only silently envy. Tiles became common for roofing in the thirteenth century; glass was made at Chiddingfold in Surrey and painted after it was manufactured.

9. BREWING and BAKING were trades, the former almost entirely in the hands of women. We have already referred to the Assizes of Bread and Ale. There was enormous jealousy and suspicion of the victualling trades and determined efforts were made to keep their members out of municipal offices, where they were apt to abuse the assize in their own interest. In connexion with this industry we have an amusing instance of



an attempt 'to make the punishment fit the crime', when a seller of bad wine was made to drink a draught of it and had the rest poured over his head.

10. The manufacture of LINEN went on at Shaftesbury in Dorset, at Lewes, and at Aylsham in Norfolk. Cord and hemp were produced at Warwick and Bridport. The latter town even in the twentieth century lives by the same industry.

**Women in Industry.** As in agriculture, so in industry and trade, the women of the Middle Ages took their full part. While the great bulk of the women were occupied in their homes supplementing the work of their husbands and fathers, either by assisting him in his craft or by adding to the family income by spinning, there was, none the less, a small body of craftsmen and traders acting for themselves. We find women members of the guilds in the following capacities :

(a) As widows they kept on their husband's trade and his apprentices, were able to take fresh apprentices and make them free of the guild. If they remarried outside the guild they usually lost their privileges.

(b) As daughters they might inherit their father's rights and could exercise them themselves or transfer them to husband or son.

(c) Lastly, they could enter the trade, as men did, by way of apprenticeship and work and trade afterwards as single women. It is interesting to find some such women among the richest members of the guilds.

It should be noted that we do not find women's names in *all* guilds, but their names do appear in the majority, and there seems little connexion between their presence or absence and the nature of the work. We find women smiths, workers at the forge, plumbers and bell-founders. We shall see afterwards how large a part they played in the woollen industry. There were many women surgeons, and we find them later in the Trinity House Guild, composed of sea-merchants and master mariners.

**Position of Allens.** We have already referred to the early weaver guilds, which may or may not have been composed of

aliens. But all through the Middle Ages we find waves of immigrants, usually of the artisan class, settling in the country. There were Flemish immigrants in the time of Henry I, who settled them finally at Ross and Haverfordwest; there were Flemish mercenaries under Stephen. They were viewed with great hostility by the English craftsman, but were safeguarded to some extent by royal patronage. German miners were regarded as specially skilful and were invited to come and direct mining operations. Aliens as merchants will appear in the next chapter.

But there was one set of aliens who held a peculiar position—the Jews. Their condition in mediaeval Europe was in one way like that of the Early Christians in the Roman Empire. The whole life of the people was so saturated with Christian formula and ceremony that it was as impossible for a conscientious Jew to carry on ordinary trade, hold land, or have social intercourse with his neighbours, as it was for Christians in a land where even a casual greeting might imply a recognition of the pagan gods. The oath custom so penetrated every part of society in Christian Europe, that it in itself excluded the Jew from ordinary avocations. In Winchester alone in England were Jews not outcasts, for we find one admitted as a burgess and member of the Merchant Gild. How ecclesiastical Winchester got over the difficulties is not recorded. Ousted thus from legitimate trade, the Jew everywhere took to moneylending, a business forbidden to Christians by all the terrors of the Church anathema. To understand the Jew it is first necessary to grasp the orthodox attitude towards usury, i.e. the taking of payment for a loan of money. The Church regarded such payment as a breach of the rule of Christ, 'Lend, hoping for nothing again'; it also rested weighty arguments on Aristotle's dictum that money, being barren, could not breed. The Church did not forbid the lending of money for a commercial venture in which the risk was shared, as nowadays in a joint stock company, but to lend money stipulating for a fixed payment for the use of it was forbidden under heavy spiritual penalties. This trade alone then was open to the Jew. There were openings for it. Needy landowners, going on a crusade

or an important court mission, wanted money and gave their land in pledge. The Jew provided the cash at an interest of some 40 per cent. per annum. Naturally he was not exactly a popular person, and he only managed to exist by royal protection. To needy Norman and Plantagenet kings he was very useful, not only as a moneylender. Being at the royal mercy, the Jew could also be tallaged at pleasure. Often he could not pay the heavy tallage, whereupon the king called in the Jew's debts and thus indirectly taxed his people. This was the basis of the intense hatred of the Jews and the desire for their expulsion. It was an act of great self-denial when Edward I banished them in 1290. But the moneylender seems indispensable, and in the thirteenth century the Jews were rivalled by a body of merchants from southern France, called *Causines* from the town of Cahors. By an ingenious plan they evaded the Usury Laws of the Church and were as big extortioners as the Jews. The Church did not allow usury, but it did allow compensation for loss. If you did not pay back your debt at the time promised the lender might suffer loss, and he was at liberty to charge you the difference (*id quod interest*) caused by the delay. Hence if he lent money for a short period free of usury, he could charge for your delay in not fulfilling the contract, and this charge was called 'interest'. By making the free period very short the difference between usury and interest almost disappeared in practice, though not in theory. It was sharp practice but legitimate, and as money was needed it was tolerated.

It has been greatly debated whether the Usury Laws were good or evil. They were probably good for the period for which they were made. Such opportunities for the use of capital as there were, were chiefly of the trading order, in which a man might fairly take the risks of commercial venture. Later, in the fifteenth century, as trade grew more complex, these laws became hampering, and as we shall see gradually dropped into abeyance. The one drawback to the system was that it tended to lock up money in the form of plate, and the free circulation of money is essential to flourishing commerce.

**Summary.** 1. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were a period of rapid growth both in trade and industry ; the towns secured charters which freed them from the hampering bands of feudalism and created hundreds of self-governing communities throughout the land.

2. The towns on the royal demesne were the most successful in the struggle for freedom, and as a result the wealthiest and most powerful.

3. Trade and industry in the Middle Ages was strictly regulated. It was forced into certain channels for better control and ordinances were dominated by the idea that each article had its 'just price' and that it was wrong to extract more, even if the consumer were willing to pay.

4. Each town was a separate entity, there was no idea of national trade. Town negotiated with town for concessions, and without them the trader of one English town had no rights whatever in another.

5. The Merchant Gild was an association of all the traders in a town, who secured the sole right to buy and sell free of tolls. It controlled all trading matters and regulations, acted as arbitrator between members, protected members against other towns, and took the place of an insurance society against sickness and poverty. It was not identical with the municipality, though the two bodies must have had many members in common.

6. The Craft Gilds were associations of men and women of the same trade or industry. They, too, aimed at monopoly and control. The gild exercised strict supervision over its members to maintain a high standard of workmanship and to prevent competition. Their charitable and religious functions were also important. The corner-stone of their organization was the custom of apprenticeship, which secured a practical training and a moral education to all prospective burgesses. A constant supply of skilled workmen was kept up by its means. The gilds in the early days were democratic and there was no great accumulation of wealth. There was a struggle for power between the gilds and the municipality, which ended for the most part by the close

of the thirteenth century in the subordination, at least in theory, of the gild to the town magistrates, and the incorporation of the former in the government of the town as useful instruments of supervision and control.

7. Most industries had at least started in the thirteenth century, though methods of manufacture were still primitive. The districts that might be called industrial differed considerably from those of modern times, chiefly because the fuel was wood not coal, and the power used, if any, was water not steam.

8. Women took a share in trade and industry, and, generally speaking, on the same terms as men.

9. There were bodies of aliens in the country, usually under the protection of the Crown, though gradually most of them became absorbed in the nation. The Jews held a peculiar position, outcasts socially, but powerful as the only holders of capital and under the direct protection of the king. They owed their position mainly to mediaeval ideas on the subject of usury.

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### 3. Trade, Home and Foreign

**Markets.** We have already made some slight references to markets and fairs, but during the period now under review the number of these increased enormously. A town could claim the right to hold a market only in two ways, either as a definite royal grant or by immemorial usage. During the thirteenth century there were 3,300 grants of markets and fairs. The former were not usually allowed within 5 or 6 miles of one another. It will be remembered that markets were weekly affairs (sometimes two days a week were allowed) and were mainly occupied in exchanging the products and supplying the current needs of the district. The articles sold would be hay, straw, faggots, timber, pigs, ale, coal, leather, gloves, furs, linen, cloth, corn and dairy produce. The tolls of a market were very valuable, as is shown by the war waged later between the university and the town of Oxford for control of them. They consisted of

a charge on every transaction both to buyer and seller. There also were stallages, or fees for the privilege of having a stall, and piccage, a charge for damage done to ground by erecting a booth.

**Fairs.** Fairs were on a much bigger scale than markets. They were granted by royal charter either to communities or to individuals for a certain limited number of days. A description of the second largest fair in England will be the best way of explaining the system. The ST. GILES'S FAIR outside Winchester was granted to the Bishop of Winchester by William II. At first held for three days, it was finally extended by Henry II to sixteen days from August 31 to September 15. The fair was opened by a procession of the bishop's officials round the city, the keys of whose gates were delivered to them and the weighing machine of the wool market closed till the fair was over. All buying and selling within the city was suspended, and then, followed by the mayor and bailiffs, the bishop's representatives rode out of the eastern gate and up St. Giles Hill. Here a special mayor, bailiff, and coroner were appointed to govern the city for the sixteen days on behalf of the bishop. The hill was quickly covered with booths and stalls, laid out in orderly fashion in streets, men from the same town keeping together in the same part. Merchants from Flanders, from Bristol, or elsewhere—each group had its own portion of ground. Then within this the men of the different trades kept together, goldsmiths in one row, cloth-dealers in another. For 7 miles round the fair was proclaimed and all other buying and selling ceased; even at Southampton nothing but victuals might be sold.

All who frequented the fair paid tolls, though London and Wallingford had a special position and men of the Merchant Gild of Winchester entered free. Dues on buying and selling, often a penny from each party, 4*d.* on every bale of wool weighed, made the fair no small part of the bishop's revenue. There was a court set up by the bishop to settle all disputes by 'law merchant', which consisted of legal customs and doctrines used by merchants throughout Europe. This court was known as the

'court of the dusty feet', 'pieds-poudreux', soon corrupted to 'Court of Pie-Powder'. In this court weights and measures were tested, the Assizes of Bread and Wine and Ale declared, disputes settled, and fraud penalized.

It must have been a lively scene; men of many nations and from all parts of southern England, of every trade and craft, chaffered and shouted against each other. Here came the lord's bailiff to lay in his year's store of iron and manufactured goods, cloth for his lord and his lady's use finer than English looms could weave or English dyers dye. Here, too, he could purchase salt and salted fish for winter stores, tar for his sheep, linen, fur, and kitchen utensils, all very much more cheaply than at the local markets. On September 15 the fair closed, wagons and packhorses streamed back over the roads, carrying to every corner of southern England the stores purchased by the buyers, while foreign merchants conveyed from Southampton port the wool and raw hides, that England provided in such quantity, to be worked up by continental craftsmen.

STOURBRIDGE FAIR outside Cambridge belonged to that town and was on an even larger scale. It enjoyed an international reputation and merchants came to it from all parts of Europe. Beginning on September 4, it lasted three weeks. It was arranged just as St. Giles's was, in streets and quarters, and its crowd of merchants was still more diverse. People came even from London to buy, though London had a continuous market and was the centre of all commerce. Among the foreigners were Venetians and Genoese with all the wares of the east, gold and jewels and spices, silks, velvets, and glass; Flamands from Bruges and Liège, Ghent, and Mechlin, with linens and lawns; Spaniards, bringing iron and wine; Frenchmen, too, with this last as well as Greeks from Crete and the islands. From the Levant came men bringing currants, almonds, and raisins; from Norway pitch and tar, while the Hanse towns of Prussia brought furs and amber, copper, iron, bow-staves, and ornamental timber. These Hanse merchants, too, brought jewels from the East by the Russian route and even porcelain from China. English merchants

brought to sell load on load of wool, lead from Derbyshire, and, if harvests were good, barley from the eastern counties to export to Flanders.

Such was the fair in mediaeval times, an essential part of the nation's life, for centuries the great centre of trade in all the luxuries of existence and of the interchange of raw materials for manufactured goods.

**Roads and Trade Routes.** But if the fairs brought from all quarters so many merchants and such quantities of goods, how did they get there? Roads in the thirteenth century were bad, but not so bad as they were four centuries later. The main great Roman roads were still passable, neglected though they had been for a large part of 800 years, and the duty fell on each parish of maintaining both them and others. This duty was variously performed; it depended largely on the lord of the manor. The repair of bridges was part of the obligation known as the *trinoda necessitas* and not even tenants in 'frank almoign'<sup>1</sup> were exempt. But it does not follow that it was always properly performed. It was also regarded as a proper object of pious benefaction, and some of the Religious Gilds referred to in the last chapter had this for one of their objects. One thing helped to force the lords to keep the roads in repair: their estates were scattered all over the country and, as we have seen, they lived by passing with all their households from one to another. This scattering of estates was part of the plans of certain kings to prevent any great baron accumulating a large compact piece of territory and trying thereby to establish himself as independent of the king.

A journey from Oxford to London took a day in summer and two days in winter. Merton College had a manor in Northumberland and it took six days' travel to reach it. The roads must have been fairly good to allow this. At the same time there were plentiful instances of neglect, and travelling in winter, when streams flooded the road and holes and bogs were not infrequent, was often dangerous to man and beast.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 37.



Much use was made of water transit, most English rivers being navigable for barges in parts. Many towns, which we should now consider inland, such as Norwich, were flourishing ports, and there was considerable coasting trade. Newcastle traded in coal in the thirteenth century as far as Southampton, and Scarborough had an extensive fishing trade, reaching even to Iceland.

Carriage was cheap; for heavy goods the charge was 1*d.* per mile per ton and it covered insurance. The conveyance of wine was more expensive, being 3½*d.* per mile per ton. There is an interesting picture in Rogers' *Six Centuries of Work and*



A COUNTRY CART

*Wages*, of the journey of the bailiff of Cuxham to London to buy mill-stones. It occurred in 1331, just a little later than our period. Cuxham lies towards Oxford, some forty-five miles from London. The journey over the Chiltern Hills through Wycombe and Uxbridge takes the best part of a day, for the bailiff travels with servants and horses. Arrived in the city or Southwark he puts up at one of the numerous inns and sallies forth to buy provisions for his party, since the inn supplied often only sleeping room. Early next day he goes down to the wharf to seek his mill-stones and finally finds five to suit him. Then he and the merchant adjourn to a tavern to argue prices. This is not done quickly nor cheaply, for five gallons of Bordeaux wine are consumed in the business. But at last they come to terms, exchange the luck penny, 'God's silver,' as evidence

of a bargain concluded, witnesses are called and the bailiff delivers his promise to pay. Next day the bailiff returns to his lord and reports progress. Some time later he returns, pays



MERCHANT WITH CART LOADED WITH MERCHANDISE

Shooting at the butts in the background.

£15 16s. 8d. for the five (multiply by twenty probably to get modern value) and sets about arranging for their carriage by water. Two days and more drink, not quite such expensive stuff this time since sailors and wharfingers do not expect wine from Bordeaux, are expended in striking the bargain and getting

the mill-stones on board. Dues are paid for wharfage and murage, to keep up the bank and the wall, and then the bailiff rides home once more after four days' absence. The vessel carrying the stones passes up the river, through swans and salmon fisheries, past Windsor and Maidenhead, where more murage is paid, and finally lands the stones at Henley. Here they are bored for use and carried in hired carts to Cuxham. Such journeys for all kinds of purposes must have been frequent; the need for the personal conduct of business was great. Merchants travelled with their wares; they did not sit in offices and conduct their business by letter, telegraph and telephone. Hence we may conclude that the roads, at least in summer, were passable to a race of hardy travellers, who asked and knew little of comfort and ease.

**The Staple.** We have seen that markets and fairs were largely a device for securing control of trade and customs by the authorities. The same idea was carried still farther in an attempt to control not merely the place of sale, but the route which goods might take. As early as 1266 we find some city selected to which alone all goods exported out of England might be sent, and since wool was our chief export it is often referred to as the wool staple. There was much competition for it; Edward I placed it first at Dordrecht, then at Bruges. In 1297 he went farther and selected nine staple ports from which alone wool could be exported. The object was of course to secure the king's revenue, a large part of which came from an export duty on wool. If all exported wool had to pass through certain ports and be sold in one town, it was possible to see that its duty was paid and smuggling was made difficult. The merchants who dealt in this export trade were known



KING'S SEAL.  
FOR RECOGNIZANCES OF  
DEBTS AT OXFORD. Temp  
Rich. II, 1377-99

as Merchants of the Staple; they formed an association, had a monopoly of the trade, and were ruled by a mayor and alderman.

**Foreign Trade.** We have seen that the Englishman of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had no love for aliens, but he was to some extent obliged to tolerate their presence, since Englishmen had ceased to be adventurous seamen and at this period were only gradually regaining their position as oversea traders. Consequently most overseas trade, and all that from the Mediterranean, was in the hands of aliens. We have seen them at the fairs, and places like London and Southampton had many of them. The native townsman did his best to make trading difficult for them and to secure as much as possible of the profits for himself. On the other hand, the monarch found these aliens very valuable; they paid him highly for special privileges and lent him money in his need. So all through the thirteenth century we find a war waged, by the citizen to secure his monopoly of internal trade, by the alien to break through the traditions that hampered him. Backed by the Crown the alien generally won.

The object of the burghess was to prevent the alien touching the *internal* trade of the country. He did not want to drive the alien away altogether, for that would destroy his own export trade, but he wanted to secure for himself the position of middleman between the alien importer and the native consumer. For this object he imposed the following restrictions:

(a) The alien could only sell wholesale and to a burghess of the town, only on market days and in full publicity.

(b) On no account must the alien sell retail.

(c) He must not go inland with his goods.

(d) He must live, not in a house of his own, but as guest of an English host, and must not stay more than forty days.

Now we have seen that merchants did not act alone, they were members of powerful societies and early learnt that collective bargaining paid. As early as 1237 we find concessions being granted by the citizens of London to the merchants of Corbie

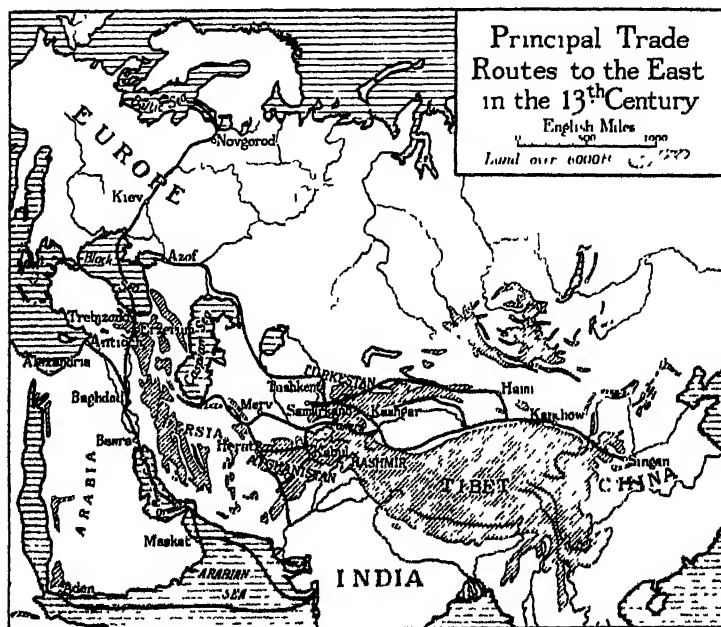
and Amiens as a whole, freeing them from most of these restrictions. At last by the *Carta Mercatoria* of 1303, Edward I abolished all the restrictions except that as to retail trade, and even that was allowed in the two valuable trades of merceries and spiceries. Also in case of disputes between aliens and burgesses, half the jury were to be chosen from merchants of the town to which the alien belonged.

**The Flemish and Teutonic Hanses.** But long before this, two powerful leagues of cities had secured for themselves in London positions of special privilege. The first was made up of cities of Flanders and northern France, seventeen towns in all. Those of France were Chalons, Reims, St. Quentin, Cambrai, Amiens, and Beauvois. They were known as the Flemish Hanse, and had a house and quarters in London and a recognized status.

But more powerful and of much longer duration was the Hanse of the greater towns of northern Germany, which lasted till the days of Elizabeth. It originated with Cologne, which later, after a short period of competition, was joined and eventually dominated by the great Baltic cities of Lübeck and Dantzic, together with Hamburg and Brunswick. Their dwelling in London was known as the **STEELYARD**, and the community lived in an armoured camp and was a celibate society. It was strongly fortified, no married man might dwell there, and the members lived as a community with a common refectory. Its master was fully armed, and the whole block of buildings, dwelling, warehouse, wharf, and garden, was encircled by a wall. By generous gifts to the city for public purposes, such as the repair and maintenance of gates, they secured toleration from the burgesses. There were also German merchants at Boston and Lynn. In 1155 their trade consisted of lead, tin, fish, meat, fine wool and jet as exports, while they imported luxuries, silver and jewels. Corn travelled both ways, according as harvests varied in England and Prussia.

**Trade Routes.** Besides the trade with Flanders in wool and cloth, with France and Gascony in wine, with Ireland in slaves,

and with Scandinavia in timber, fish, and tar, there was also considerable trade with the great Italian cities. English wool found its way to Lucca and Florence via the Seine, the Rhone and Marseilles, or overland by Paris, Lyons and Turin. In 1284 most of the English monasteries agreed to sell all their wool to the Florentines.



Spiceries, silks and gems from India found their way to our western island by three principal routes :

(a) From India by water to Bagdad, up the Tigris and across the desert to Antioch.

(b) The second route was from Western India to Aden, across the desert to the Nile, down the river to Cairo and by canal to Alexandria. This route was safer, but the spices were apt to get damaged on it and the Sultan of Egypt exacted a toll of 33½ per cent.

Both these routes were in the hands of the Venetians and Genoese

(c) The third followed the same line as the first to the Tigris, then across the highlands of Armenia to Trebizond and the Black Sea, then by Kief and Novgorod to the Oder and the Baltic.

The Latin Conquest of Constantinople in the thirteenth century roused the fanaticism of the Mohammedan tribes of Asia Minor and so blocked the first route entirely and the third to an extent that made it dangerous though not impossible. It was the Turkish pressure that created a desire for an all-sea route to India, which led in the fifteenth century to the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope and of America.

**Summary.** 1. English trade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was carried on by means of markets and fairs. All towns possessed the former, and there was a good number of the latter. The market was a weekly event and supplied local needs, the fair came once a year for a limited number of days and provided the chief mart for wholesale selling and for provision of stores.

2. Roads were not very good, but might have been worse. They were kept in repair as a charge on the parishes, but it was also necessary often to appeal to the piety or benevolence of men and communities to get extensive repairs done.

3. The authorities tried to control trade routes for the principal articles of commerce, especially of wool. This was done to secure proper supervision and also the king's customs. The Staple was part of such a scheme, whereby the trade was driven into the hands of certain merchants and carried on at a fixed place.

4. Foreign trade was almost entirely in the hands of aliens at this period. They were viewed with great hostility by the English traders and attempts made to circumscribe their activity. The king supported the aliens and early in the fourteenth century they had broken down the burgher monopoly. The Flemish and Teutonic Hanses were associations of certain cities that secured for their merchants special privileges at an early date.

#### 4. Taxation—Money

WE have seen<sup>1</sup> how in the eleventh century the king was expected to 'live of his own' and out of his vast feudal estates, together with certain other dues of immemorial custom, he had to provide for the public expenses of government and defence, as well as of his own household. But as time went on the expenses of government increased, especially when to England and Normandy were added the large continental possessions of the Angevin princes. Henry II enormously increased the efficiency of the central government and consequently added to its cost; his endless journeys up and down the land must alone have been a considerable item of the royal expenditure; Richard I was not exactly a cheap luxury—an absentee king in search of martial glory is apt to prove not worth his cost—and neither John nor Henry III did anything to mend matters. At the same time the revenue from feudal sources was decreasing, much land had been granted away from the crown and civil war and revolting barons from time to time caused loss and confusion in the collection of such dues as still existed. Hence we find kings like Henry II and Edward I seeking new methods of taxation that would not be injurious to the kingdom, and others like John resorting to tyrannous exactions and unscrupulous dealings.

**New Sources of Taxation.** The principal fresh sources of taxation devised during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were as follows. Some were not new, but merely developed into regular taxes from rights rarely exercised.

(a) **SCUTAGE.** The first of these and the least permanent was scutage. It was introduced in 1159 and heralded the breakdown of the essentially military feudal organization. The feudal host was obviously not a convenient instrument with which to wage war of any length or at any great distance from home. The tenants-in-chief were apt to have strong views on their

<sup>1</sup> See p. 26.



monarch's projects, and if they involved lengthy expeditions across the seas, they even ventured to claim that they were only bound to serve within the realm. So in 1159, when Henry II planned an expedition to far distant Toulouse, he decided to levy a charge on all knight's fees in all his possessions English and continental, excusing the knights in return from serving, and using the money to engage a host of mercenaries. In England the sum levied was £1 6s. 8d. (2 marks) on the knight's fee. In 1189 it was levied at 10s., and under Henry III it rose to 3 marks. Even this commutation of service was not paid without opposition, and the resistance of the barons of the northern counties, who claimed that they should be exempt, since on them fell the defence of the northern border, had a good deal to do with the crisis of 1215. Scutage continued to be levied at intervals till 1322, when it was paid for the last time by bishops, clergy and women called to fight against the Scots.

(b) **TALLAGE OF THE ROYAL DEMESNE.** The right to tallage or tax his tenants was possessed by every feudal lord, including of course the king. In early times the king exercised it mainly for special occasions and special needs. As the richest towns were on the royal demesne, it was on the burgesses of these that the chief burden fell. Sometimes the demand was made on the rich merchants only, sometimes a bargain was made between the officers of the Exchequer and the town as a whole. After 1322 it also fell into disuse, the only trace of it remaining being the tenth paid by the towns as contrasted with the fifteenth paid by the country districts whenever Parliament granted a subsidy.

(c) **TAXATION OF MOVABLES.** All feudal taxes fell on the holder of land, and not till late in the twelfth century was any attempt made to tax other property. In 1188 Henry II proposed to join the Crusade and looked round for means to raise the necessary money. At the time of the first Crusade, a century earlier, the Church had demanded a contribution from every man in proportion to his property of whatever kind, his oath

being taken that he was making a fair estimate. But Henry required something surer than an oath, even in an age when detected perjury involved excommunication. In 1181 he had adopted the method of the Domesday survey, of estimate by sworn jury, in order to organize the defence of the country. Combining now the precedent of the Church and the system recently adopted for the Assize of Arms, he and his Council levied a tax of one-tenth on every man's goods, land, stock, house and furniture. Certain things were excepted, such as the armour, horses and clothes of a knight, horses, books and clothes of clergy, also church furniture. Throughout the next century similar taxes were levied at intervals, sometimes a fifteenth, sometimes other fractions. The assessment was made often by elected representatives of knights in each shire. In 1334, however, an important change was made. By assessment in that year the total value of a tax of one-fifteenth and one-tenth on counties and towns respectively was estimated at some £39,000, and henceforth this assessment stood. It soon ceased to bear any real relation to one-fifteenth or one-tenth of the individual's property, but whenever Parliament voted the king a 'fifteenth and a tenth' it was taken to mean this sum of £39,000. Then, whatever a county or a town paid as its share in 1334 it continued to pay, the sum being shared up as fairly as might be among the dwellers in the area. If the sum of £39,000 was not sufficient to meet the king's needs then Parliament voted two fifteenths and tenths or more. Sometimes half a fifteenth and tenth sufficed. This custom belongs really to the next period of our history, but as practically no change in the form of taxation was made from 1334 to Tudor days, it seems well to finish the matter here.

(d) CUSTOMS. It will be remembered that one of the king's rights consisted in the power to commandeer his subjects' property for the royal use, paying a fixed price, often below the market value. This right of pre-emption<sup>1</sup> existed from earliest times and extended to all kinds of goods. Its primary object

<sup>1</sup> See p. 29.

was the supply of the king's household. Now it is no great extension of the idea that the king should claim the same right over merchandise sent for export from the kingdom, or luxuries like wine brought in from outside. Obviously, too, the ports were the easiest place from which to exercise this right. Probably, not certainly, for we have no actual record of the origin of such dues, the levies on exports and imports that we find existing in the twelfth century and known as 'Customs' arose in some such way. Again, the king was guardian of the realm, the gateways of which it was his right to loose or bar. With mediaeval ideas on the subject of aliens it is not surprising to find a levy on the goods exported and imported by these foreigners, and the fact that England held the monopoly of raw wool disguised and partially prevented the incidence of the export tax on the native producer. However they arose, there is no question that levies on exports and imports were an early part of the king's revenue.

Up to the year 1275 we find the following customs :

(a) The ANCIENT CUSTOMS on exported wool, woolfells, hides, lead and tin, the sum being fixed and customary.

(b) The RECTA PRISA on wines, being the royal right to one cask in 10, 2 in 20 or more, of all imported.

(c) Any advance on these two or extension to other goods was called a NEW CUSTOM.

(d) If these three did not suffice for the royal needs, the king levied a largely increased duty, which was promptly stigmatized as a MALTOLTE, or evil custom. This often reached as high as a fourth or more of the gross value. Sometimes it was levied in kind, and in this form might extend to a seizure of the whole of the goods.

But in 1275 the nation struck a bargain with the king and the Ancient Custom was fixed at 6s. 8d. on every sack of wool and every 300 woolfells, and 13s. 4d. on every last of hides, and these customs remained always, irrespective of any other grants made to the king. In 1297 Edward I tried to increase the duty to 3 marks, but the country called this a maltolte and in the

Confirmatio Cartarum the king undertook to levy no Customs without the consent of Parliament beyond those settled in 1275. The maltolte thus became a subsidy and is again and again granted by Parliament at need. The other ancient right of the king to bar the gates to strangers was quite in line with the desires of the nation ; the more the king made it difficult for aliens, the more the native merchant approved ; the larger the sum exacted from them the less would the king demand from his own subjects. But there is a point at which such taxation must prevent the stranger coming at all, and as yet the English merchant needed him. So in 1303 by the CARTA MERCATORIA Edward struck a bargain with the aliens also. Instead of prisage they offered 2s. on every tun of wine imported, they would pay 3s. 4d. per sack of wool above the ancient custom and also extra on cloth and wax, together with a poundage of 3d. per lb. on all goods exported or imported. These were known henceforth as the NEW CUSTOMS. They were paid by aliens only. An offer to commute prisage of wine in the same way to English merchants was scornfully refused, to their great loss later when wine trebled in price. There were thus at the beginning of the fourteenth century five branches of the customs, viz. :

(a) The Ancient Customs as fixed in 1275. These needed no parliamentary sanction, but were levied continuously.

(b) The Recta Prisa on wine imported by natives.

(c) The New Customs paid by aliens, as agreed in 1303.

(d) Subsidies granted by Parliament, limited in amount and time. They often took the form of a tax on wool, or of tunnage and poundage, i.e. a levy on every tun of wine and every pound of merchandise passing through the ports.

(e) Purveyance, now greatly limited by force of public opinion and supposed not to exceed the needs of the king's household.

All these continued much the same up to the end of the fifteenth century.

**Methods of Collection—Control—Audit.** The collection of all the various dues in each county was made for the most part

by the sheriff. All the monies from the royal demesne, the profits of justice, the farms of the towns, danegeld, scutage and tallage were all collected by the sheriff of the county, who rendered account of them. In the twelfth century only some 14 boroughs and a few honours<sup>1</sup> accounted separately for their dues and not through the sheriff. The Customs were collected by customers, who supervised all the merchandise going in and out of the country and saw weighed the sacks of wool and bales of hides and sealed them with the coket, an impression on a thin disk of heated lead which would easily adhere to the canvas. Wax began to be used instead about the time of Edward IV.

So much for the collection—what of the accounts kept? How did the statesmen of the early Middle Ages meet the problem of making sure that the Government received the monies levied in its name? We do not know how it was accomplished before the twelfth century, but about 1118 the Exchequer was devised and we have a treatise describing its working, written about 1177 by Richard the Treasurer, written, too, with the object of making clear in every detail the scheme for receiving and entering the revenue returns. The Exchequer was a Court for the receipt of monies and for the book-keeping, as we should now call it, necessary to record the receipt. It met at Westminster twice a year at Easter and at Michaelmas. It took its name from a chequered cloth used for the calculations, and it was this chequered cloth, a new device introduced early in the twelfth century, that revolutionized the system of accounts. It was a new method of calculating, based on the abacus. It must be remembered that numbers were written in Roman figures, and you have only to try to do a simple sum in them, without the help of our modern Arabic numerals, to realize the extreme difficulty. The abacus was a scheme to make things easier. On a table of sand or a black cloth rule columns; the columns may represent units, tens, hundreds, thousands, or they may represent £ s. d. Then put in each column counters for as many tens or hundreds, &c. as you want. No counters in a column

<sup>1</sup> See p. 37.

stood for zero, but the idea of a figure for zero had not yet reached Europe from the Arabs. So if you wanted to represent any number, say 207, you could only do it by using 3 columns and putting 2 counters in the first, none in the second, and seven in the third ; but you had to have the columns. At the Exchequer you were dealing with *£ s. d.* and the arrangement was as follows. A table 10 ft. by 5 ft. had round it a ledge to



THREE METHODS OF CALCULATING : with casting-counters, ciphering on paper with pen and ink, and reckoning with chalk.

prevent the counters rolling off, over the table was spread a cloth ruled in columns either 9 inches or a foot wide and with certain horizontal lines that need not concern us. The result was like a chess board and hence the name. Round this board were seated a number of important people. Imagine the table placed at the top of a room, its long sides parallel to the end of the room. At the right-hand end of the table sat the Justiciar, the most important man in the kingdom after the king, on his right and left the Bishop of Winchester and the Chancellor.

Down the long side of the table, facing the room, were the Treasurer and the various writers of the rolls in which the receipts were entered. One wrote the Great Roll, now called the Pipe Roll, and another made a duplicate for the Chancellor. The Chancellor's clerk overlooked this latter to see it was correct, and as in course of time the Chancellor became too busy to attend, the whole duty fell on the Chancellor's clerk, who eventually became known as the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Facing the writers on the other long side of the table, with their backs



RECKONING WITH CASTING COUNTERS

to the room, were the people who did the actual calculations and gave the receipts. At the bottom end of the table sat the sheriff and his clerk. There were others present about whom we will not trouble. The sheriff began by reading out the sums he had expended in the king's name, and as each was allowed, the calculator laid on the table, in the proper columns, counters representing the sums. There were seven columns for pence, shillings, pounds, scores of pounds, hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands. When all the sheriff's outgoings were placed on the table, above them was placed the sum due from him, and then the subtraction made by taking away the counters in pairs



PIPE ROLL I, M. II. Specimen of Pipe Rolls, A. D. 1130.

one from above and one from below, till either set, receipts or expenditure, had none left. The result was then entered in the roll, and a receipt given to the sheriff.

The receipts would be strange to us in these days. They were called tallies and consisted of a square stick of hazel wood about 8 inches long. There was a hole bored at the end so that they could be strung on a rod and filed. The receipt was recorded by cutting out notches down each edge of the wood. A cut as broad as the palm of your hand stood for £1,000, the breadth of your thumb for £100, of your little finger for a score, one pound was represented as the width of a swelling barleycorn, a shilling slightly smaller, and pennies by mere cuts. The name was recorded on the tally, which was then split nearly as far as the bored hole. The sheriff kept the larger piece called the stock, the Exchequer the smaller called the foil. To prove receipt the two pieces were brought together and were shown to match or tally exactly. It was a simple and convenient form of receipt and fraud was almost impossible. It is interesting to note the survival of the words stock and foil. Until 100 years ago the Bank of England gave tallies as receipts for loan. So, if you lent them money, you received the

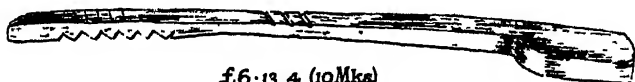


stock of a tally and were said to hold Bank stock for so much. The word foil persists in the 'counterfoil' of a cheque. Some thirteenth-century exchequer tallies still exist in the Record Office.

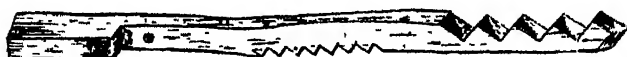
How did the Sheriff pay his dues? If you go to a bank to cash a cheque, you will be asked politely 'How will you take it?' whereby the clerk means will you have notes or gold or



£3 6·8 (5Mks)



£6·13 4 (10Mks)



£87·10 0



£166·13·4 (250Mks)

#### STOCKS OF THIRTEENTH-CENTURY EXCHEQUER TALLIES

silver? How did the Exchequer take it? In silver pennies, for there was nothing else. Now the silver penny of the twelfth century was not a very sure sort of coin, for it got badly damaged in use. So there were two ways of securing that the government should not lose. If the sheriff paid by tale, i.e. by counting the coins, then a first test was made by weighing some of the coins against a pound weight. There should be 240 pennies to the pound; if it required more than 246 then the money was refused altogether. But if the money proved thus of fair value it was

accepted, only the sheriff had to pay one extra shilling in the pound. Sometimes the sheriff was expected to pay not by tale but by weight, and then it was necessary to make sure against false coins. To do this 44 shillings' worth was selected and 20 of these tested by being melted and compared with standard silver. Or, if this assay was not made, the sheriff might be charged an average of 6*d.* in the pound instead.

It will, of course, have occurred to you that transporting thousands of pounds' worth of silver from, say, Nottingham to Westminster must have been costly and dangerous. Partly to meet this difficulty, partly as a way of anticipating the royal revenue, creditors of the Crown were often paid by 'assignments' on the customers or the sheriff. Instead of the creditor being paid out of the money in the Treasury, he was given a writ authorizing the sheriff or the customer to pay so much out of the royal receipts now in his hands. This saved, perhaps, journeys to the creditor and much movement of coins by the sheriff. It was, however, apt to become a dodge for postponing payment, for often the customer or the sheriff had not, or said he had not, funds sufficient in hand to pay, and you might wait long years or sometimes never get any money at all.

**Money.** We said above that the only coin was the silver penny and this was true all through this period. We read about marks (value 13*s.* 4*d.*), pounds and shillings, but no such coins existed until the time of Henry VII; they were merely names. The English penny was known abroad as the esterlin; it had a good reputation and was worth 2 and 4 times as much as continental ones. Hence a sum of 240 pennies was one pound of sterlings, and so to-day £1 sterling means one pound English.

As this is the first time we have considered money, it may be well to say a few words on its history. In the early days of barter money was chiefly a means of storing value, not a measure of exchange. But even in the earliest day occasional need for money arose, such as the arrival of traders with jewels or fine robes, or a wer-gild had to be paid. Money can, of course, be anything, for it is only a standard by which value is measured ;

it has often been cattle, in Africa cowrie shells have been used, Sparta preferred iron. But it soon became evident that silver and gold were compact, easily handled, not easily destroyed and, consequently, more convenient than most things for this purpose.

The first coinage after the Fall of Rome was struck by the Merovingian kings of the Franks, and England followed soon after by coining silver coins called 'sceattas' for the Frisian trade. The silver penny was coined by Offa in the eighth century. Coinage was a royal prerogative and in England the kings successfully kept their right, while on the Continent half the feudal lords claimed and exercised it. No English king until Henry VIII was guilty of debasing it, indeed they all made great efforts to secure its purity. In early days there were many moneyers in the kingdom and apparently most of them dishonest, for Henry I in 1125 took vengeance on the whole company of them by enforcing the penalty of mutilation of the right hand on every one. New dies were often issued by the government, but it was difficult to prevent clipping of coins, which differed often in size and had no milled edge.

Since the English coinage was so much better than the foreign it was important to keep out the bad and retain the good, for if both are allowed the bad invariably takes the place of the good, which rapidly disappears either into hoards or the melting pot. Consequently exportation of coin or bullion or even of plate was forbidden generally throughout the Middle Ages. It was not that they held any theory about increasing the power of the nation by increasing its money reserve, but that there really was not a great supply and it was necessary to preserve it. In an age too when prices were regulated, it was necessary that the money standard should be steady and constant; also if money gets scarce prices sink and may even go below the level that makes it worth while to produce.

**Summary.** 1. New sources of taxation had to be found in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, owing to decrease of feudal dues and increase of the cost of government. The

principal new taxes were: (a) Scutage 1159 to 1322; (b) Tallage of royal demesne, also ceased after 1322; (c) Taxation of movables, introduced in 1188 and fixed in amount in 1334; (d) Customs, largely extended and regularized.

2. The collection of these taxes fell on the sheriff and the royal 'customers'.

3. The accounts were kept at the Exchequer, where a special system for receiving, receipting, and recording the payments was devised early in the twelfth century.

4. The coinage remained almost the same throughout the Middle Ages, consisting chiefly of silver pennies. Much care was taken to keep up the standard and value of English coins and to prevent them being supplemented by baser foreign ones.

## PART III

### THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

#### 1. The Decay of Villeinage and the Breakdown of the Feudal System

**Commutation of Labour Services.** When we were speaking of the cotters in Part II, we said that their position was interesting because they became the nucleus of a class of wage-earning labourers. Let us see how and when the change took place. The cotters had some five acres of land from which to draw a livelihood for their families, and unless they could add to it in some way they were likely to starve. On the other hand, the lord often found that the labour he got from his villeins was difficult to supervise and troublesome to exact. Also, the richer villeins were glad to get out of their services if they could and devote themselves to their own land. So at an early date we find two things :

(a) The villein may *find* the labour instead of performing it himself.

(b) The lord takes money instead of labour service and uses it to hire his own labourers.

The second plan is called *commutation of labour rents*. There is a case as early as 1110, but it does not appear often till well on in the thirteenth century. For some time the services had had a money value attached to them as fines in cases where the villeins neglected them, so it was not difficult to make the change. Both parties gained by it. The villeins could devote their time to their own fields, and the lord was free to get labour when and how he pleased. The first services to get commuted were the week-work of the villeins, later came those of the cotters, and last of all the boon-works.<sup>1</sup> These last the lord was

<sup>1</sup> See p. 6.

reluctant to part with, because in times of harvest, unless he could get the whole village to work for him, there was danger of the crops being lost, for there were no extra sources of labour from which to draw.

But even these boon-days went at last and by 1327 commutation of all services was common. The process was, however, gradual and labour rents survived till the late sixteenth century, in Cumberland and Northumberland even till the eighteenth and nineteenth. It has been said that both parties gained, but we shall see presently that in the end, owing to events no one could foresee, the labourers scored most. At first the lords were anxious for the change and sometimes even forced it on their tenants, but it must be remembered that the lords retained their rights and could, and did, adopt one plan or the other as suited them. But on the whole the movement was towards freedom, and indeed the latter part of the thirteenth century was a time of prosperity for all. This was largely due to the wise and strong government of Edward I.

**Alienation of demesne.** Another change began in the thirteenth century, developed all through the fourteenth, and by 1500 had altered the land tenure of a large part of the country. This was the plan of letting the demesne in enclosed farms, which were soon shown to be more profitable than open-field agriculture. The lord also began to increase his demesne by enclosing parts of the waste and turning it into arable land. This he had the legal right to do, but it produced bitter opposition. The whole feeling of the Middle Ages was against the idea that a man could do what he chose with his own. He was entitled to get a fair living out of it according to his station of life, but to pile up a huge fortune at the expense of the poor was a defiance of public opinion that only a few dared. The STATUTE OF MERTON in 1236 expressly forbade the lord to take more of the common pasture than would leave enough for the sheep and cattle of the freehold tenants, but it did allow his right to enclose up to that limit.

**Famine and Pestilence.—The Black Death.** The prosperity

of the thirteenth century, a prosperity still evident to us in the beautiful and costly churches and abbeys which have come down to us from that period either intact or in ruins, was followed by a disastrous era of famine and war and pestilence. In the years 1315 and 1316 was a great failure of the harvest. In 1316 from Michaelmas to Christmas, it is said, it rained without a day's intermission. The harvest failed utterly, and many died of starvation. A murrain among the cattle followed. The unhealthy ways of living, prevalent among all classes of society, brought disease which underfed bodies could not resist and more still died thus. But for the moment the nation recovered and wages rose some 20 per cent. owing to scarcity of hands, harvests were good, and in 1337 the nation plunged recklessly into a war with France. As is usually the case, the early years of a war not fought on our own land brought prosperity. It employed numbers of men as soldiers, occupied barons of the fiercer sort, giving their tenants a rest from what was often a heavy tyranny, and in the general prosperity the taxation was hardly felt. Many villeins prospered and bought their freedom with money which was legally their lord's, according to lawyer's theories, but which the custom of the manor, and possibly his need of ready cash to pay his soldiers, forced the lord to accept.

But this prosperity was to receive a fearful check. In 1348 a new and terrible pestilence made its appearance. It is said to have arisen in China, spread westward and leapt on Europe like a resistless flood. Before a new disease nations are liable to go down even to extinction, and European civilization nearly succumbed to this. Our forefathers called it the BLACK DEATH, and we know it still in the East as the Plague. It attacked all classes alike and seemed most fatal to the young and strong. The pestilence spread throughout Europe, and even to Iceland and Greenland; it is estimated to have claimed 25 million victims. It appeared in England on August 1, 1348, in seaport towns of Dorsetshire, travelled west and north to Bristol. In vain the citizens of Gloucester closed their gates to travellers

from the south, the terror reached Oxford and was in London by November, in Norwich in January, and by the end of 1349 raiding troopers had carried it back to Scotland. The mortality was appalling, though the numbers given by contemporary writers are incredible. There is no doubt, however, that at least one-third and probably half of the entire population perished.

Now it is obvious that a nation cannot lose even one-third of its population without profoundly modifying its economy.



THE MERCHANT

Whole households had disappeared, land lay idle with no heir to claim it, rich and poor alike were faced with the problem of there being only one man where there had been two. In some places even whole villages had disappeared. The principal results may be summarized as follows :

(a) There was an unheard-of scarcity of labour with the result that wages rose, of men by 50 per cent. and of women by 100 per cent. They had been

rising before 1348, as we saw, but nothing like this. In many places labour could not be got at all and the land lay untilled.

(b) The money possessed by each survivor was doubled since the population was halved, and as prices of the necessaries of life, unlike those of luxuries, did not rise greatly, the poor in particular were more prosperous.

(c) The small freeholder, who worked his land by his own labour and that of his family, was able to buy land cheap from a lord who could not afford to work it with hired labour at the price now demanded, so he prospered.

(d) On the other hand, as a result of the rise of the cost of labour the lord was less willing to commute services, and if he



did he valued them more highly, and for some would only accept a money-rent on a tenure which agreed that if any one came forward offering the old services, then the tenant should surrender the land to him. This made the villeins discontented

(e) The villeins, besides seeing the labourers prospering, found themselves hard put to it to cultivate their land or to pay their rent, whether in service or money, for the household was halved but the rent remained the same. Many villeins threw up their holdings in disgust and migrated to the towns.

It will be obvious that the landlord was in a parlous state. All the luxuries of life, everything that depended on skilled labour increased in price; unless he were prepared to alter his standard of living, he must find some means of getting cheaper labour. On the other hand, the labourer saw his chance and took it. He combined, he formed secret societies, and if the lord refused his demands, he left the manor and went to work for some one who would pay what he asked. Legally he could not



THE REEVE

do this, but whom was the lord to send to fetch him back? he had no men to spare and a residence of a year and a day in a town made the fugitive free; if he fled to the cloister or the war, neither church nor army gave him up easily. It was not only that the landlords were in a quandary, there was a very real danger that the country might suffer seriously by land going out of cultivation.

**Statutes of Labourers.** As early as 1349 the government stepped in and issued an Ordinance, which in 1351 was converted into a Statute. These were the first attempts to regulate by law the economic arrangements of the manor. The principal measures were:

(a) All labourers were to work for the rates current in 1346, and no landowner was to pay more, under penalty. The labourers named were carters, ploughmen, shepherds, swincherds and 'all other servants'. The lord of their manor had first claim on them, after that they must work for any who hired them. 'None shall go out of the town where he dwelleth in the winter to serve the summer' so long as he can find work where he is.

(b) An attempt was made to fix the price of victuals.

In 1360 the Act was renewed with increased penalties; imprisonment was substituted for a fine for accepting higher wages or refusing the low ones, and labourers who went to another country to escape compulsion were outlawed and, if captured, branded with an F 'for their falsity'. Later, no artificer, labourer, or servant was to leave the hundred where he dwelt without a certificate authorizing him or her to do so; if he did, he was liable to be placed in the stocks. In 1368 the Act was again repeated, and in 1388 further attempts to



THE MAN OF LAWE

keep the labourer on the land were made. Craftsmen were to work in harvest time, when called on, and *any boy or girl who had worked on the land before he was twelve years old was not to leave it for any other occupation*. The Act further assessed wages for the whole country, but this proved impracticable, and in 1389 Justices of the Peace were appointed to assess them locally. Time after time were these Acts renewed but, as the preamble of the next Act usually tells us, with small result. The last was passed in 1496. All sorts of schemes were put forward and every kind of compulsion resorted to, still the drift to the towns went on though apparently great efforts were made to enforce the law.

One notable feature of the fifteenth century is the practical disappearance of women from agriculture, and the tax returns of 1377-81 give us one reason why. For there we find that women craft workers, websters, dyers, brewsters, and innkeepers pay taxes from 6*d.* to 1*s.*, while in agriculture the actual farmers alone pay 1*s.*, the woman agricultural labourer is assessed at the minimum groat. So the women also drifted to the towns, or spent their time in home industries for which the luxury of the nobles gave ample scope and a greater reward. The late fourteenth century was a time of great splendour, of pageants and shows and the most elaborate dress, for the continental war, while it drained the country by taxation, enriched the few by the loot of the fair lands of France.

It will naturally occur to us to ask, did these laws against the labourer succeed? The answer is, partially. Their constant repetition shows they did not succeed wholly—wages rose in spite of them, and even the landowners defied them in the scramble for workers. But it seems probable that without them, wages would have soared far higher. Workmen combined, in stealth and secrecy for combination was illegal, and when the pressure became too strong in one district the more enterprising fled to another. None the less we have ample record that the penalties were enforced and no doubt overawed many.

One effect of these statutes their originators certainly did not foresee, they helped considerably to break up the manor. For they admitted the claim of other lords to the services of the labourer; if his own lord had no use for him he was to work for another. The integrity of the manor no longer existed.

As to the equity of these laws, there can hardly be two opinions. They were passed by a parliament of landowners in their own interest, and the wages were fixed by Justices of the Peace



THE SOMNOUR

drawn from the landowning class ; it was class legislation of the worst kind ; they set a precedent that was only too gladly followed and each class in turn, as it gained control of the government, set to work to secure its own prosperity and to exploit those whose voice could only be heard in occasional riot and rebellion.

**The Great Revolt.** But for the moment the labourer was prospering and his success made him increase his demands on life. There is a limit below which struggle is not merely hopeless



THE RICH AT DINNER, fourteenth century.

but impossible. One of the causes of the Great Revolt in 1381 was that the labourer was prospering as he never had before, and new hopes and ambitions were stirring within him. The attempts of the landlords to frustrate his hopes, by enforcing the Statutes of Labourers, and still more by refusing further commutations of service rents or renewal of old ones, were rapidly rousing the villeinage to seething indignation. Other causes were :

(a) The mismanagement of the war with France, a war which the whole nation refused to see as wasteful and useless. It was firmly fixed in the minds of all classes that, but for treachery and incompetence in high places, France could be conquered,

and it would have been impossible to convince them that even had that desirable event occurred England would have been worse off rather than better—though they might have been hard put to it to say in what way individual Englishmen would have gained by it. It is probably this political aspect of the rebellion that accounts for the large number of freemen and even men of standing and rank that took part in it.

(b) It is now fairly certain that Wyclif and his 'poor priests' had nothing to do with it, and Wyclif's own attitude certainly



DOMESTIC COSTUME, fifteenth century.

recognized the rights of property. But it is probable that his attacks on the wealth of the church and his general ideas of freedom had effects outside the world of religion and helped to upset the general acquiescence in things as they were. The challenge of one established order soon spreads to others, often in ways most abhorrent to the original rebel.

(c) The immediate spark that fired the train was the Poll Tax of 1380. The government finance was bad, the court extravagant, and the war wasteful. The customs revenue fell owing to troubles in Flanders, which country took most of our

wool. In 1377 a graduated poll tax, varying from 4*d.* a head to £6 3*s.* 8*d.*, had been levied and paid. In 1380 a similar tax of 1*s.* on every one was levied, but it was to be so adjusted locally that the rich man paid more than the poor. The difference made, however, was not large and the tax pressed heavily on the poorer classes. A shilling represented some three or four days' work, say 10*s.* to 15*s.* at the present day, and this on every member of the household over fifteen years of age. The nation met the exaction by a strange and unexpected method. It forced or bribed the commissioners to wink at false returns and whole villages conspired to suppress the existence of from one-quarter to one-third of their numbers. The fraud was too impudent and too general to succeed, and the government sent special investigators to detect the culprits. Blind to the seething discontent, they omitted to protect their commissioners, and on the murder of one or two of them the whole of the eastern counties blazed into rebellion. We do not know how it was planned, but its almost simultaneous character suggests that it was not altogether unprepared. It was very well organized, and, as rebellions go, excellently controlled in many districts. It was for the most part confined to the eastern and home counties, though there were sporadic riots in Somerset and Yorkshire. These latter seem to have had little connexion with the main movement. The north was cut off largely by a belt of forest and marsh stretching from Norwich to the mouth of the Mersey. It also seems to have been ahead of the south and east in commutation of labour rents for money. Not a few of the towns joined in; in these the grievances were akin to, though differing in detail from, those of the rural population. The revolt called out some remarkable leaders, such as Wat Tyler and Geoffrey Litster; the latter organized Norfolk in a way to excite our admiration. The tale of them has reached us through their bitter enemies the monks, but that some of them were disinterested resisters of oppression is clear. William Grindcobbe was released by the Abbot of St. Albans in the hope that he would buy his life by inducing his followers to disperse.

Even the slandering monk cannot disguise the beauty of the address of this 'son of Belial'. 'Friends,' he is reported to have said, 'who, after so long an age of oppression, have at last won yourselves a short breath of freedom, hold firm while you can, and have no thought of me or what I may suffer. For if I die for the cause of the liberty we have won, I shall think myself happy to end my life as a martyr. Act now as you would have acted supposing that I had been beheaded at Hertford yesterday.'<sup>1</sup> Chivalry in the fourteenth century was rarely extended to any outside the class of its professor, and seldom indeed did it penetrate the cloister. The St. Albans monk, who tells the story, gloats over the brutal and disgusting penalty this hero and his friends paid for their misdeeds. Several of the leaders were probably old soldiers, which would account for the unusual discipline. This was no Jacquerie, an orgy of loot and vengeance that had occurred in France thirteen years before; it was organized revolt with definite aims and considerable self-control. Both the proceedings and the demands of the rebels show this.

Their proceedings usually were :

(a) Destruction of the Court Rolls, which contained the evidence of the villein services and dues.

(b) Demand for charters of freedom from lords and especially from abbots and priors. The abbots in particular held out against the demands of the towns.

(c) The killing of most of the lawyers they could lay their hands on partly, no doubt, because legal ingenuity had been used in the interest of the landowner rather than of the labourer, partly in that unreasoning hatred and fear of an art he does not understand common in all ages to the ignorant. There were doubtless many Mr. Tullivers then as now.

The political factor in the revolt was shown by the murder of Archbishop Sudbury and the Treasurer and the sacking of John of Gaunt's palace, the Savoy.

The rebels made four principal demands :

(a) All villeinage to be abolished, especially the incidents of

<sup>1</sup> Oman, *The Great Revolt*, p. 97.

merchet (fine on marrying one's daughter), heriot (fine on taking up one's heritage), and the ducs demanded when one sold one's stock.

(b) All land to be let at a perpetual money rent of 4*d* an acre. This was below the average value of land in 1381.

(c) That there should be no restriction on buying and selling.

(d) A general amnesty.

In the panic that seized the government, who were apparently taken unawares, these demands were granted and pledges given ; but when the rebels dispersed, carrying with them the coveted charters and manumissions, all such pledges were shamelessly broken. There seems some reason to think that the government hesitated and was half inclined to make concessions ; but they threw the onus of a decision on parliament and they could have had little doubt of the answer. A parliament of landowners is usually reactionary, certainly in England has never shown itself capable of rising above the interests of its class. All concessions were repudiated, all illegal murders on the part of those who put down the rebellion justified, and the members as a body repudiated any suggestion that they might be willing to free their serfs. A sort of amnesty was granted, 287 persons and the town of Bury St. Edmunds being excepted by name. Other towns bought their pardon by a heavy fine. According to the ideas of the time this was not outrageous vengeance and many of the 287 eventually were pardoned.

RESULT. How far, if at all, did the Revolt succeed ? On this point historians differ in every possible degree. Some say that the rebels secured within the next century all they asked, others that the revolt neither hastened nor retarded the freedom of the serf. The truth is probably somewhere between. Villeinage was dying before 1381, but the process was slow ; it is not unlikely that the revolt hastened its decease. For the moment reaction set in and the lot of the serf became heavier, but when the first rage of indignation was over the landlord found himself confronted with all the old troubles, economic in origin, which he was powerless to alter, while he had a wholesome memory of



a certain month of June in 1381 when revolted labour held a dagger at his throat. Openly he blustered and passed his Acts against the labourer, practically he gave in or took measures in another direction of which we must speak presently. The labourer was beaten, and for the moment beaten badly, but he too had a memory of the great year. He had seen the government reduced to ineptitude by panic, he had tested his power, things could never be quite so bad again. It must not be forgotten that a revolt of labourers was a far more serious matter in the fourteenth century than now, when a handful of soldiers with a machine-gun can clear a street. The fathers of Wat Tyler's men had won Créçy armed merely with bow and arrows, and their sons were to show on the field of Agincourt that the labourer was as good a man as the knight. It is significant that the next revolt, of Jack Cade in 1450, was entirely political and not social. Above all, the charters extorted from terrified overlords in 1381 became models towards which the bargaining tenant worked. From whatever cause it came the doom of villeinage had sounded. By the end of the fifteenth century it is no longer the customary tenure, as early as 1460 the royal courts are protecting the villein against his lord, and small freeholders are numerous in the land. The villein becomes the *copyholder*, holding his land for a money rent by tenure based on a copy of the Court Roll of his manor.

#### **The Landlord's Position at the End of the Fourteenth Century.**

The economic changes of the three centuries since Domesday are well illustrated in the story of the Berkeley family in the county of Gloucester. From 1189, when Maurice de Berkeley was lord of many manors in Gloucester, Somerset, and Essex, till 1326 the first four heads of the family steadily pursued the policy of converting customary tenancies into freeholds at a quit rent, high for the time. They also enclosed the waste and converted it in the same way. The demesne they cultivated as a home farm, with its own labourers, its reeve, and its bailiff. But the third Lord Berkeley, who ruled from 1326-61, was a forerunner of Townshend and the farmer nobles of the eighteenth century, and we have a striking and unusual picture of a feudal

baron attending all the markets and fairs of the neighbourhood, and buying and selling corn and stock. He foresaw that land would rise rather than fall in value, and bought back his freeholds,



A FARM IN FEBRUARY

letting them on lease. His successors followed the same policy and after 1385 extended it to the demesne. 'Then', says the seventeenth-century chronicler of the Berkeleys, 'began the times to alter, and hee with them (much occasioned by the insurrection of Wat Tyler and generally of all the commons in the land), and then instead of manuring his demesnes in each

manor with his own servants' oxen, kine, sheep, poultry, and the like, under the oversight of the Reeves of the manors. . . . This lord began to joyst and tack in other men's cattle into his pasture grounds by the week, month, and quarter: and to sell his meadow grounds by the acre. And after in the time of Henry IV let out by the year still more and more by the acre as he found chapmen and price to his liking.' Here we see the



#### LABOURERS AND ARTIFICERS OF THE XVII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

process of a line of intelligent landowners adapting themselves to the economic conditions of their times.

1. Possessed of large demesnes, they were able to keep a number of servants, cotters, and men who, villeins by birth, yet had no land (younger sons and such). Thus supplied with labour, they commuted their villeins' services and made them freeholders at a rent.

2. In the fourteenth century these rents ceased to represent the value of the land, so the lord bought it back and leased it at a higher rent for a term of years.

3. Labour getting scarce, he did the same with his demesne lands.

Besides these plans adopted by the Berkeleys, two other remedies were found to meet the changed conditions :

4. Many let their demesne to tenants with little or no capital, on a stock and land lease, the tenant renting the stock as well as the land. This enabled the poorer but skilled farmer to take up land ; with luck he prospered and often became a freeholder.

All the above changes show the landlord ' ceasing to be a patriarchal farmer and becoming a mere rent receiver '.<sup>1</sup> One unfortunate result of this was the increase of penniless younger sons. The inheritance being now all land, which passed strictly by primogeniture, the younger son of the higher noble became a charge on the state for whom court office had to be found ; the younger son of the lesser noble took to adventure, became a free lance or mere mercenary, often little less than a brigand. Both types became a public nuisance.

5. But a fifth remedy awaited the perplexed landowner, if he were enterprising enough to use it. Labour was scarce and sheep farming, which required little, was very profitable. In the north-west this change began early, for the damper west was never good for wheat growing. The change was easy to make, as the villages were small hamlets and the two- and three-field system did not exist there. It was, too, a thinly populated district and consequently even large sheep-walks found employment for most of the population. But when about the middle of the fifteenth century, in the corn-growing districts of the south and east, the great landlords began to enclose for sheep farms, the cry of the ousted peasantry got louder and louder and distress increased as the century drew to a close.

**Enclosures.** The general term enclosures covers three different processes, all of which begin about this time :

(a) Enclosure of the land in strips, by exchange and purchase, so that a villein could have his farm in two or three parts instead

<sup>1</sup> Prothero, *History of English Farming*, p. 46.

of scattered in some thirty or sixty strips all over the common fields. The process was one of equitable exchange and tended towards improved farming.

(b) Enclosures of common or waste by the lord, with or without the consent of the freeholders. This often pressed heavily on the poorer villeins, who lost common rights, but if the enclosed land was turned into arable it provided more work for the cotter and labourer.

(c) Enclosure of demesne and turning it into sheep walks. This produced a serious economic disturbance. The description given by Sir Thomas More in 1516 is probably not exaggerated, though it must be remembered that the enclosures were by no means universal and that the bulk of the land remained in the south and midlands in open fields. 'Your shepe, that were wont to be so myke and tame, and so smal eaters, now, as I heare saie be become so greate devowerers, and so wylde, that they eate up and swallow down the very men themselves. They consume, destroy, and devoure hole fieldes, houses, and cities. For looke in what partes of the realm doth growe the fynyst and therefore the dearest woll, there noble and gentleman, yea and certayn Abbottes, holy men God wote, not contenting themselves with the yearly revennues and profyttes that were wont to grow to theyr forefathers and predecessours of theyr landes, nor beyng content that they live in rest and pleasure, nothing profytyng, ye, much noyinge the weale publique, lease no grounde for tillage; they enclose all in pastures; they throw doune houses; they pluck down tounes; and leave nothing stondyng but only the church, to make of it a shepehowse. . . the husbandmen be thrust oute of their own; or els other by cousyne or fraude, or by violent oppression, they be put besides it, or by wronges and iniuries they be so wried that they be compelled to sell all. . . and yet then also they be cast into prison as vagaboundes, because they go about and worke not; whom no man will set a worke, though they never so willingly offer themselves thereto. For one shepherd is ynough and eate up that ground with cattel,

to the occupying wherof about husbandrye many hands were requysyte.'<sup>1</sup>

The distress caused by the increase of enclosures became serious about 1485, and in 1489 we begin a series of Acts of Parliament that attempt to stop it. The government was seriously disturbed at the depopulation caused in certain districts. Particularly was this the case in the Isle of Wight, where it was important to have sufficient population to secure the island against raids by the French. These enclosures were rarely illegal. The copyholder was now to some extent protected in the King's Courts against his lord, but the fine on taking up an inheritance was often at the will of the lord, who could raise it till it became prohibitive. It is, however, to be noted that copyhold rents were often below the current value of the land and the landlord's fine might only represent his share of what we should call nowadays the *unearned increment*. By this phrase we mean an increased value in property, usually land, due not to any labour or expenditure of capital by the owner, but to outside causes or general economic changes, such as increased value of products due to greater demand, or the approach of a large city when land for building becomes valuable often to an extent ten or twenty times that of its value for agriculture. In all these changes the open-field farmer suffered least, though he also had least chance of making money.

**Effect of the Wars of the Roses.** (a) Apparently these wars were not very disastrous to the common people. Where actual fighting took place, both parties burnt and wasted with equal brutality, but the bulk of the land escaped and the actual fighters were the nobles and their retainers.

(b) But while the ordinary people lived their lives as usual, except for occasional raids due to the abrogation of law, the nobles were busy in mutual destruction. By the accession of Henry VII there was little of the old powerful baronage left, that baronage which having lost the strong control of Norman and Plantagenet kings had threatened the nation with a feudal

<sup>1</sup> More, *Utopia*, First Booke, p. 18.

anarchy, such as cursed France and Europe generally. The death of the old lines, the advent of new men raised from the middle class made a strong government, a thinly disguised autocracy, possible, and, for the moment, it was a blessing to the nation. Its blessings and its dangers we shall see in the next century ; for good or ill it made modern England.



CANTERBURY PILGRIMS. Showing costume and a town of the fifteenth century.

(c) The rise of the middle class, men who were bred in commercial ideas, ended the long-drawn-out dying of the manorial system. Land became a commercial asset, men were no longer content with a moderate return for their money, the semi-patriarchal condition was broken—money took the place of men. The old lords had valued their land partly for the men-at-arms its possession gave them—the new men asked wealth, and peopled the land with sheep.

(d) The disbanding of retainers, coinciding with the change

from arable to pasture, helped to swell the ranks of the unemployed, and this section soon became the unemployable.

**Summary.** 1. The fourteenth century opened with fair prospects for the rural community. Villeins were commuting their services, lords were farming their demesne or letting it out to prosperous smallholders. Harvests were good and the land, except for the Scotch war, at peace.

2. The Black Death in 1348-9 halved the population and shook the national organization to its foundation. Labour was scarce, wages rose, the peasant prospered, while the landowner of big estates found himself on the verge of ruin. Attempts to coerce the labourer were only partially successful.

3. The Great Revolt of 1381 probably hastened the processes already begun, and villeinage merged gradually into copyhold tenure, and by the end of the fifteenth century was nearing extinction.

4. The first half of the fifteenth century was one of great prosperity to the agricultural labourer, wages were high, prices not greatly advanced. But after 1450 the conversion of arable to pasture created a body of unemployed, which the political disorders of the time tended to turn into a body of brigands, and by the end of the century the lot of the labourer had reached a low level, the nobles were mostly dead, and the day of the city and the trader was at hand.

## 2. The Woollen Industry

**Early History.** It is sometimes asserted that up to the time of Edward III the English clothworking industry was practically non-existent. This is not the case. It is true that the bulk of the wool grown in England was exported and that Flanders was almost entirely dependent on English sheep to supply the raw material for that industry, which made it the central manufacturing country of Europe. But as early as the twelfth century there were weavers' guilds in London, Oxford, Lincoln, Hunting-



don, Nottingham, Winchester, and York, and in 1182 the king bought in Lincoln scarlet cloth at 6s. 8d. the ell and blanket and 'green say' at 3s. In the thirteenth century we find mention of 'Blues of Beverley, scarlets and greens of Lincoln, scarlets and blues of Stamford, coverlets of Winchester and cloth of Totnes'. There are references in the Venice Customs records of 1265 to English 'Stamfords' and also to 'Milanese Stamfords', showing that English cloth was even worth imitating. In 1302 one Boston ship carried for export £250 worth of cloth, belonging to one merchant. In 1312 one-fifth of the townspeople of Bristol were occupied in the cloth industry.

**Action of Edward III.** But for some reason, not altogether discoverable, the manufacture declined and Edward III revived a policy, started but not carried out by the Parliament of Oxford in 1258, of encouraging and protecting the industry. His measures are not always easy to follow, for foreign policy was apt to interfere, but we may sum them up by saying that, when the needs of war and diplomacy left him free, he aimed at building up a prosperous cloth manufacture at home and at preventing the export of all but our surplus wool to the looms of Flanders. His measures having this aim were as follows :

(a) **INVITATIONS TO FOREIGN ARTISANS.** If the English worker had forgotten his craft, some one must be got to teach him to regain his skill and improve on it. Flemish craftsmen were without rival, and, fortunately for England, the state of affairs in that country was such as to make it easy to attract its artisans across the sea. The Flemish workers, struggling for self-government, had in 1328 been completely defeated by their Count and his suzerain, Philip of Valois, and hundreds were banished. Also the smaller towns and villages were full of craftsmen struggling against the monopoly claimed by the big cities. If the English king would offer freedom to live and work and sell, he was likely to find plenty to accept the offer. In 1331 a beginning was made by the issue of letters of protection to one John Kempe, a master and craftsman of Flanders, 'his men, servants and apprentices'. A similar grant was made

in 1336 to a man of Brabant, and in 1337 a statute was enacted making the most liberal promises to any foreign cloth-workers who would settle in England. Many came and settled in London, York, Winchester, Norwich, Bristol, and other places.

(b) PROHIBITION OF THE EXPORT OF WOOL. But Edward III was not content with improving the English manufacture; in 1332 he started measures to protect the home industry, by forbidding for two years the wearing of imported cloth by all but the wealthy. In 1337 he forbade importation of foreign cloth and the exportation of wool. This protective policy was not consistently maintained, for foreign policy interfered with purely economic measures and the need to cajole or coerce the Flemings during the fluctuations of the French war rendered his measures inconsistent. Thus in 1347 the export of wool was allowed, but the Good Parliament in 1376 reversed this policy and raised the cry of English wool for English craftsmen. Richard II and the Lancastrians allowed the export of wool, but Edward IV, since the Yorkist cause rested largely on the support of the towns, reverted to protection of the English industry.

This policy of State protection was merely a gradual extension of that of the municipalities. They had each severally taken steps to protect themselves from outside competition, and after some hesitation and vacillations the authorities gradually adopted for the nation the same principles. There was at this time probably no general conception of such a theory as later became formulated as the 'mercantile system', but the tentative measures undoubtedly laid the foundation for such a system. One of these measures was the removal in 1353 of the staple from Bruges to England. English merchants in Bruges suffered from many restrictions, and it was thought that in England they would be free and that the competition of the men of many nations would raise prices for the benefit of the English grower of wool. The plan was resorted to on several occasions, but eventually the staple was fixed at Calais.

(c) DUTY ON CLOTH AND WOOL. Edward's third measure was to arrange the export duties so that it should pay better

to export cloth than wool. Cloth was allowed to be exported after a payment of a duty of less than 2 per cent.; the duty on wool was as much as 33½ per cent. So drastic was this latter duty, that in 1424 Parliament had to pass an Act forbidding the sending of sheep over sea in order to shear them there. It must be remembered that, in the fourteenth century, England was practically the only source of wool for western Europe. In the fifteenth century Spain began to supply large quantities, but even then it was necessary to have English wool to mix with it.

These measures of Edward III were entirely successful. During the fifteenth century England changed economically from a country that exported raw material to one that exported manufactures. How great the change was can be judged by the fact that it coincided in time with the agricultural revolution that turned large areas of wheat land into pasture. Indeed, the increased demand for wool for English manufacture helped to bring about the agricultural change. The new industry not only absorbed the old wool supply, which in Edward III's reign exported some 30,000 sacks annually, but was ready to use up as much more as the landowners chose to provide. By 1500 the export of wool had fallen to 5,000 sacks, while the quantity of wool produced in the country was enormously increased. In 1355 between 5,000 and 6,000 cloths were exported, by 1500 the Merchant Adventurers alone exported 60,000, in 1509 they sent out 84,789, and in 1547 the number had risen to over 122,000.

**The Aulnager.** Since the corner-stone of mediæval commerce and industry was supervision, it is obvious that, when a manufacture became of more than local importance, the substitution of national control for municipal was inevitable. When the State began to control a large exporting industry, the officials who regulated could no longer be nominees of the mayor of each little town. The cloth manufacture was the first to undergo the change. The State office of the aulnager was in existence as early as the time of Edward I. His business was to ensure a good quality and a standard length and breadth of cloth. In early days the English traders objected to his interference

and his control was confined to imported cloth. When the manufacture of English cloth became extensive, his control was extended to it, and a fee was charged for his services, on every roll of cloth a haltpenny; this was the aulnage. There was much opposition, and much vacillation on the part of the government, but the general trend of policy was towards an enforcement of the Assize of Cloth, which compelled rolls to be of a fixed length. Besides the national control each town had its own



THE ANCIENT WOOL-HOUSE, SOUTHAMPTON

regulations as to the sale of cloth. In many towns it was decreed that all cloth should be sold at one central market, and makers both in the town and from the country districts round were forced under penalties to bring their cloth to this place for sale. Thus Norwich had its 'Worsted Seld', Bristol its Saturday market in Touker Street, and Southampton its 'Cloth Hall', to select a few out of many cases. The merchants of each town watched jealously to prevent outsiders selling any of their wares retail, and the London drapers even tried to prevent wholesale trade with any but themselves. This, however, the central government interfered to prevent. The market for cloth

in London was fixed in 1396 at Blackwell Hall between the hours of 11 a.m. on Thursday and 11 a.m. on Saturday, and in 1405 the drapers were allowed to appoint a keeper of the hall. There were, however, frequent evasions and much friction between cloth sellers from other towns and the London drapers, who tried to get control of the whole trade throughout the kingdom.

**Process of Manufacture.** Subdivision of labour appears very early in the cloth manufacture, and, even though it was through-



SPINNING. SECOND HALF OF FIFTEENTH CENTURY

out quite definitely a hand-craft, there were numerous processes involved which were performed by different people. Machinery has to-day greatly increased the number of the processes, but in the Middle Ages the conversion of wool from the sheep's back into finished cloth was not the simple work of one or two hands that it is sometimes taken to have been.

In the following verses describing the processes involved, there are five named, even before it gets to the spinster. She would often be the wife or daughter of a farmer, thus making use of her spare time; for until the invention of the spinning jenny in the eighteenth century, there was always more demand for

yarn for the looms than the workers could supply. Consequently practically every woman was a 'spinster', even great ladies spinning where now they would embroider, in their spare time. From the spinster the yarn passed to the weaver, the central pivot of the manufacture; weaving too was largely done by women, but by no means always in their spare time. It was strenuous work and very skilled, and required a long apprenticeship. The hand loom is fundamentally a frame on which the threads of the warp are stretched and where, by means of a foot lever, the alternate threads can be raised or lowered so that the shuttle holding the woof thread passes between them. The process is then repeated by lowering the threads that were above and raising the others. It is like darning, only instead of the needle moving under and over alternate threads, the needle would remain level and the alternate threads move up and down. But when the cloth is woven there is more to be done; seven more processes are named by the poet before it is ready for the market. It will be easily seen how great must have been the numbers employed in this industry.

First the Parter, that doth neatly cull  
 The finer from the coarser sort of wool.  
 The Dyer then in order next doth stand  
 With sweating brow and a laborious hand.  
 With oil they then asperge it, which being done  
 The careful hand of Mixers round it runne.  
 The Stock carder his arms doth hard employ  
 (Remembering Friday is our Market Day).  
 The knee-carder doth (without controule)  
 Quickly convert it to a lesser roule.  
 Which done the Spinster doth in hand it take  
 And of two hundred roubles one threed doth make.  
 The Weaver next doth warp and weave the chain,  
 Whilst Puss his cat stands mewling for a skane;  
 But he laborious with his hands and heels,  
 Forgets his cat and cries, Come boy with queles.  
 Being fill'd, the Brayer doth it mundifie  
 From oyle and dirt that in the same doth lie.  
 The Burler then (yea, thousands in this place)  
 The thick-set weed with nimble hand doth chase.

The fuller then close by his stock doth stand  
And will not once shake Morpheus by the hand.  
The Rower next his arm lifts up on high,  
And near him sings the Shearman merrily.  
The Drawer last, that many faults doth hide  
(Whom merchant nor the weaver can abide),  
Yet is he one in most cloths stops more holes  
Than there be stairs to the top of Paul's.<sup>1</sup>

The carder separated out coarse wool and impurities by means of wire teeth fixed on a piece of leather and attached to a board with a handle. On the quills was wound the thread used for the woof. The burler got rid of lumps and loose ends, while the fuller washed and cleansed and beat and stretched the cloth. Fullers were also called 'Walkers', whence the common surname; they walked or stamped on the cloth when soaking, which both cleansed and thickened it. The rower roughed up all loose threads and hairs with teazles, bringing up the nap ready for the shearman to shear it smooth, after which the drawer drew together all holes and faults, producing an even surface.

**The Rise of the Capitalist.** Now it will easily be seen that a manufacture involving subdivision among so many people would tend to produce some one who would take charge of the whole industry and *employ* the other workers. The fullers, who were practically the finishers of the cloth, might easily step into such a position. Instead of taking their chance of buying cloth from the weavers, finishing it and selling it as opportunity came, it must early have occurred to the cleverer ones that it would pay better to buy yarn or even raw wool and pay the spinster and the weaver and all the others for their labour, instead of waiting for the farmer to sell his wool to the carder and spinner, the spinner to sell the spun yarn to the weaver and the weaver the undressed cloth to the fuller. There would be economy of time and labour if they supervised the whole thing themselves from the beginning. Or again, the fuller was in the habit of selling his finished cloth wholesale to the draper to sell retail; what more likely to occur to an enterprising draper than the

<sup>1</sup> Richard Watts in *The Young Man's Looking Glass*, published 1641

idea of himself buying the raw wool and seeing it through all its processes, securing for himself some of the many profits. Whatever class originated it, it is certain that even in the fourteenth century there were men who had started on such a scheme, for we find at Barnstaple two manufacturers paying aulnage on over 1,000 cloths each, which obviously must have been made and finished by others than themselves. The same thing was happening in Salisbury and other parts. Thus the cloth trade gives us the earliest example of the capitalist in English industry. A man who could buy or find money to have made over 1,000 cloths in a year, was obviously no simple craftsman, but an employer of labour with accumulated capital.

But the fifteenth century went further and even anticipated in one or two instances the factory system of four centuries later. One John Winchcombe, known in ballads as Jack of Newbury, is said to have gathered 200 looms in one building and to have employed 600 men, women, and children. A ballad of a century later describes how :—

Within one room being large and long  
 There stood two hundred looms full strong :  
 Two hundred men the truth is so  
 Wrought in these looms all in a row.  
 By every one a pretty boy  
 Sate making quills with mickle joy.  
 And in another place hard by,  
 An hundred women merrily  
 Were carding hard with joyful cheer  
 Who singing sate with voices clear.  
 And in a chamber close beside,  
 Two hundred maidens did abide  
 In petticoats of Stammell red,  
 And milk-white kerchiefs on their head,  
 . . . . .  
 And spinning so with voices meet  
 Like Nightingales they sung full sweet.  
 Then to another roome came they  
 Where children were in poore array :  
 And every one sat picking wool,  
 The finest from the coarse to cull :



The number was seven score and ten,  
The children of poore silly men :  
And these their labours to requite  
Had every one a penny at night,  
Beside their meat and drinke all day,  
Which was to them a wondrous stay.<sup>1</sup>

The numbers are legendary, the happiness of the hands perhaps mythical, but it is certain that Jack of Newbury was a very successful capitalist clothier. He was not the only one, and the mid sixteenth century saw deserted monasteries turned into cloth factories and the daughter of Thomas Spring of Lavenham in Suffolk, clothier and capitalist, married to Aubrey de Vere, son of the Earl of Oxford. This is a long cry from the simple gildsman with one apprentice and a wife and daughter, and is a portent, both hopeful and ominous, for the next four centuries. It is significant that 1464 saw the first enactment against payment by Truck, i.e. an attempt by the employer to pay part wages in food or goods instead of money, a method that was nothing short of swindling the worker.

**Breakdown of the Gild System.** 'The essence of the gild system lay in the control of industry by the industrial workers themselves, through an elected authority appointed by them. In the capitalist system, on the other hand, this control is transferred to men who stand outside the ranks of the industrial workers, and are frequently in conflict with them.'<sup>2</sup> We have seen how the increasing complexity of manufacture in the cloth industry gave an opening to the establishment of the capitalist. As he very soon found himself hampered by gild rules and restrictions, his next move was to take the industry outside the towns to the country districts where the workers were not bound by rules made to prevent competition and did their work by such methods and in such times as pleased them. This seemed like liberty, but really exposed them to the exploitation of the capitalist, who used their competition to cut down wages. The gilds tried in vain to keep their monopoly, and gradually, what is

<sup>1</sup> *Works of Thomas Deloney*, edited by F. O. Mann.

<sup>2</sup> E. Lipson, *Introduction to the Economic History of England*, p. 417.

known as the *domestic system*, by which the employer finds capital and gives out work to wage-earners working in their own homes, preferably outside the town, took the place of the old industrial control by the workers themselves. The connexion between this early capitalism and the cloth industry is illustrated by the number and size of the beautiful churches that arose



THE CUSTOM HOUSE, KING'S LYNN

during the fifteenth century in the principal cloth area of England. In Norfolk these are often out of all proportion to the present needs of the villages around them, and they bear mute evidence to the wealth and generosity of the fifteenth-century manufacturer. Other buildings besides churches show the wealth of the rising middle class. Fifteenth-century houses still exist in most large towns, spacious, picturesque, and decorated with fine carved work. Market crosses often of great beauty arose, while

the great livery companies of London started to build themselves spacious halls almost regardless of expense. Useful public works were not neglected by the wealthy trader, streets were paved, new water-supplies provided, gates, quays, bridges, wharves, harbours, sluices and aqueducts were supplied either by public subscription or private benefaction. Richard Whittington devoted his wealth to supplying London with water, and he was not alone in such public action. England was becoming



BLAKENEY HARBOUR

a 'nation of shopkeepers', but in the fifteenth century the 'shopkeepers' were princely in their generosity and public spirit. The state kept by the greater merchants is well illustrated by William Canynge of Bristol, who in 1461 entertained King Edward IV in fashion that rivalled that of a great noble. Even in the Poll-Tax returns of 1379 we find the Mayor of London assessed at £4 at the same rate as an earl, the mayors of other large towns, like barons, at £2, and great merchants at £1.

Needless to say the gilds did not suffer their organization to be thus undermined without a struggle. Their policy was, however, very short-sighted. The maintenance of their own

personal monopoly became the chief object of the wealthier members, and for this end they proceeded (*a*) to limit the number of apprentices, (*b*) to raise the fees both for membership of the gild and for the freedom of the city, (*c*) to add to the expenses attaching to membership. The chief of these were the great costliness of the compulsory feasts and the increasing elaboration of the pageants and mystery plays. The burden of thus entertaining the people had early been thrown on the gilds, and much time, money, and ingenuity were spent on it. At Norwich no less than twelve pageants were produced each year by 12 groups of craft-gilds; at York the various incidents were allotted to appropriate trades, for the Armourers showed Adam and Eve driven from Paradise, while the Shipwrights built Noah's ark and the Fishers and Mariners provided the Flood. The productions were on no mean scale and became a serious tax on the poorer members. Throughout the fifteenth century there were bitter complaints of the unwillingness of the gildsmen to pay their share, and many petitions to be released from the obligation.

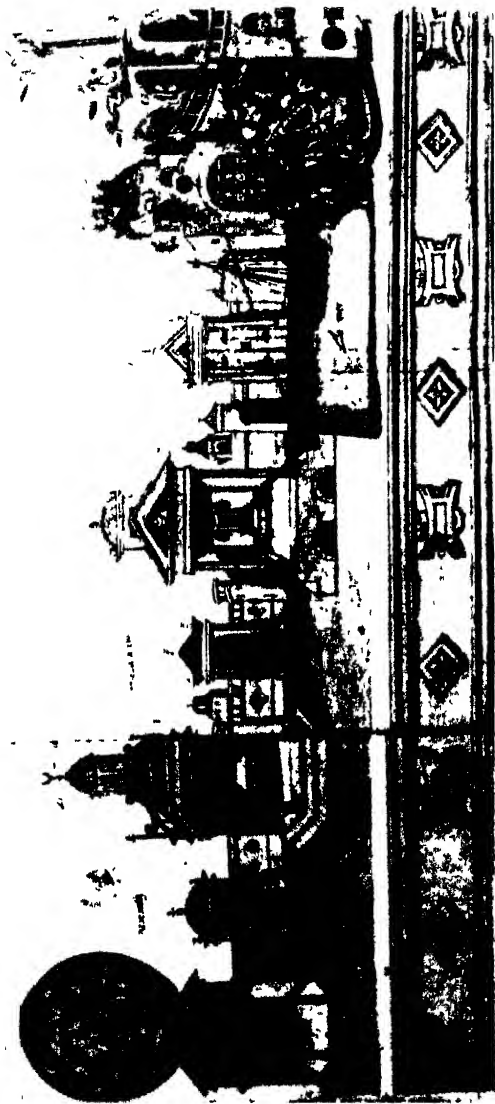
Had the gilds been successful in maintaining their legal monopoly of the craft these measures might have succeeded for a time, but since the expanding power of trade prevented this they only achieved their own ruin. This fell all the more swiftly because of the growing laziness and indifference of the general mass of craftsmen, who shirked office and even attendance at meetings, leaving to the astute and wealthy the power and the burden of office.

Within the gilds the chief results were as follows:

(*a*) The increasing cost of setting up as a master prevented the apprentices starting for themselves, and so we find a large body of journeymen growing up either outside the gild or powerless members within it, whose wages and conditions of work were dictated to them by their masters and employers.

(*b*) The appearance of a sharp class distinction between 'brethren of the clothing', or livery, and ordinary members. It had been common in early days for gilds, both craft-gilds and religious ones, to wear a distinctive dress on festal occasions,

THE ELABORATE STAGING OF A MIRACLE PLAY



and as wealth increased this livery became more and more costly. At last it came to be confined to the richer members, and from among these the wardens and other officers were selected.

The journeymen did not give in without a struggle. They formed guilds of their own and combined to resist attempts either to lower their wages or increase their hours of labour. They entered, too, on a campaign to secure better conditions, for the Black Death had given them the same chance it gave to the agricultural labourer and they were not slow to use it. Their method was the strike and even the 'sympathetic strike', whereby all stopped work if one master tried to injure one workman. The masters replied by 'blacklisting' and agreed not to employ the revolting servant of a fellow-gildsman. The Journeyman Guild of the fifteenth century was thus much more like the modern Trade Union than was the Craft Guild, but its fate was less happy. It suffered from two things, (1) the fact that it was constantly losing its cleverer members, who managed to pass into the ranks of master-craftsmen and employers, for the capital required was not yet so large as to take from an enterprising journeyman all hope of such advancement, (2) that the general trend of public opinion was against them. Mediaeval opinion still objected to combinations that raised the cost of an article against the consumer, and though the masters had no objection to so combining themselves they were careful always to pose as guardians of the public welfare, when standing out against their employés' demands. 'The right to strike was denied by law and vehemently resisted by public opinion as contrary to the common good.'<sup>1</sup> The fight was bitter and both sides on occasion resorted to physical force, as when in 1387 the journeymen shoemakers 'because that Richard Bonet of the trade aforesaid would not agree with them made assault upon him so that he hardly escaped with his life', and in 1358 the master-weavers attacked their journeymen 'with pole-axes, baslards, and iron pointed poles'. But on the whole throughout the

<sup>1</sup> A. S. Green, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century*, ii. 127.

fifteenth century the masters held their own ; though wages did go up, the journeymen remained largely at the mercy of their employers.

Meanwhile the poorer masters, those not of the livery, were becoming of less and less importance in the gilds and were sinking to the level of the journeymen. The liveries, finding it difficult to repress entirely the recalcitrant journeymen, who persisted in forming their own gilds even under colour of purely religious objects, conceived the idea of joining the smaller masters with these wage-workers in one body as subordinate members of their own gilds under the title of 'yeomanry'. Being strictly subordinate to the oligarchs their association ceased to be in any sense a trade union.

The control of the gilds having thus passed to a few rich members, these proceeded to abuse their powers. They made regulations in their own interests, such as limiting the rate at which members should work and so keeping the supply short and the price high. They manipulated the civic offices so that there was no one to control them except their fellow members, who naturally omitted to do so.

Lastly, it was during the fifteenth century that the trader became separated from the craftsman. In early days the craftsman made and sold the article he worked in. But in the fifteenth century the class of traders who made nothing but bought from the maker to sell to the public, became general. We have seen it in the cloth trade even in the century before, by 1500 it had extended to most industries. It was this trading class that produced the great inequality of wealth. These traders were not in the craft-gilds, but they formed 'Companies', which, controlling the market, came to control the craft-gild and helped to reduce it to unimportance.

**The Towns.** The changes that took place in the gilds are only concentrated examples of what was going on throughout the land in all the towns. The increase of wealth and the rise of the capitalist gave an impetus towards prosperity that sent many a municipality far, in increased numbers, in rising com-

merce and industry, and in material improvement. On the other hand, there were also forces at work which threatened ruin to other towns less fortunate or less enterprising. The story of towns like Colchester and Bridport shows the rising tide of prosperity. In Colchester in 1300 the wealthiest tradesman, in a population of some 2,000, was a butcher, the valuation of his entire stock and property being £7 15s. 2d. Even multiplied by 20 to get an approximate sum in modern money, this can hardly be called wealth. But during the fourteenth century makers of cloth arrived, and in 1373 there was wealth enough in the town to provide a Wool Hall and add a fine porch to the entrance to the Moot Hall. By 1400 the population had doubled. The progress of Bridport is even more remarkable. In 1319 Bridport had 180 burgesses, but at a 'view of arms' there was not a bow and arrows among them; knives, daggers, hatchets, or pole-axes were their only weapons. The richest burgess in the town owned one cow, two hogs, two brass platters, a few hides, and a little furniture—value in all £4 8s.—while the best innkeeper in the place owned two hogs, two beds, two tablecloths, two hand-napkins, a horse, a brass pot, a platter, some wooden vessels, and some malt. But by 1458 there was a great change; settlers from Bristol and from Holland had brought prosperity; toll hall, gild hall, and church had been repaired, ornamented, or rebuilt, and the muster roll showed, in place of almost unarmed peasants, a brave array of men with bows and arrows as well as daggers and spears, many of them 'marching proudly with their mails, jacks, salets, and white harness with a basnet'.<sup>1</sup>

The re-building and enlarging of churches that marked the fifteenth century has already been referred to, together with much valuable and public-spirited work within the towns themselves. Indeed, there was plenty of opportunity for such public munificence. The condition of a mediaeval town at the end of the fourteenth century beggars description. Often the streets were choked with refuse, not merely that from the

<sup>1</sup> A. S. Green, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century*, i. 15.



ordinary household, considerable in itself in an age when drainage was unknown and the public street was the only dust-bin, but from all the manifold trades as well. Timber dealers and builders blocked them with trees and logs, dyers poured out their waste water, butcher and swine-keeper threw into them the refuse of the slaughter-house, while any enterprising citizen who listed turned a stream across the way or built a dam for his private convenience, reducing the road to a swamp. In Aylesbury, one Richard Boose dug a large hole in the public highway to get clay to mend his mill. The hole became a lake, in which a man and horse were drowned. The miller, charged with the death, was acquitted on the ground that he had no malicious intent and really could not get this particular clay elsewhere !

But though often thus tolerant of squalor and selfishness, protests did arise and much work of civic reform was undertaken. Though convinced that 'Dirt has nothing to do with disease', in spite of constant epidemics which made the ordinary death-rate as high as that of a modern cholera outbreak, still the growing desire of men with wealth to spend for a pleasanter existence led to much improvement. Streets were repaired, either at the public expense or by some prosperous citizen, hovels replaced by fine shops with chambers over them, markets and wool-halls built, enlarged, or beautified. Water-supply, wharves, quays, all received attention in proportion as the prosperity of the town grew. It is to the credit of York that in 1371, seventeen years before Parliament took the matter in hand, its authorities passed regulations forbidding refuse heaps outside doors and dunghills in the city, while the owners of wandering pigs were fined, or the animals, if found in the High Street, killed.

The whole of England, however, was not equally prosperous. The shifting industry, while it brought prosperity to one place, often ruined another. War, while it left many towns unaffected, did not entirely spare all. The coast towns suffered badly from French raids ; Rye, Southampton, and other southern ports

were burnt more than once ; taxation for a useless war, which the nation would not give up and could not win, drained the resources of places already holding their own with difficulty, while every now and again some town fell a victim to the ruthless savagery of the faction war. Though the richer towns bought immunity from White or Red Rose as occasion demanded, the poorer ones were not always as successful ; Peterborough, Cambridge, and Boston were burnt. As a result we find that from 1433 onwards constant remission of taxation has to be granted to impoverished towns. Lincoln in particular is exempted again and again. War, fire, and pestilence were, however, not the only causes of municipal decay. We have seen how the policy of the guilds helped to drive industry from the town to the country. Their exclusiveness, combined with the preference of the increasing number of capitalists for unorganized labour, resulted in a migration from town to suburbs that in the end often ruined the town.

The increase of the villages in what we may call industrial areas, such as Norfolk and Somerset, is shown by the rise of a large number of religious guilds, often as many as 5 or 6 in one village, and in Norfolk over 900 all told. Their purpose we have already seen ; their presence indicates a transformation in village life and the growth of a middle class there.

**Labour Questions.** The combined effect of the agricultural and industrial changes of the fifteenth century was the concentration of wealth in fewer hands, the increase in numbers of the pure wage-earner, and the consequent beginnings of that labour problem which has vexed England for over four centuries with ever-increasing intensity. The scarcity of labour caused by the Black Death, while it for a time improved the position of the labourer, practically forced the landowner into an economy of production which was best secured by the formation of large estates occupied in that branch of farming which required fewest workers, viz wool growing. At the same moment an enterprising monarch embarked on a policy which changed England from a country producing only raw material to one of

manufacture, which, from the multiplicity of its processes, tended also to produce the capitalist and the controller of large business. Consequently, when land and craft alike became controlled by a comparatively few rich men, the systems of the manor and the gild, devised for a totally different arrangement of society, equally broke down and in the resulting chaos the weak went to the wall, old supports fell, and rich and poor faced each other as increasingly open enemies. 'As the weaker members of the crowd from time to time sank back into utter penury, the outcasts of the industrial system slowly gathered into a new brotherhood of the destitute; and even in the fifteenth century . . . the advanced guard of the army of paupers appear in the streets of the boroughs to trouble the counsels of municipal rulers.'<sup>1</sup>

**General Industries.** 1. COAL. There was no great increase in the coal trade until the sixteenth century. The labour of the coal miner was very badly paid and workers were difficult to get. Wood and charcoal continued to be the principal fuels.

2. IRON. There was considerable increase in the manufacture of iron, chiefly for weapons of war. The Sussex ironfield was developed and became the centre for the manufacture of cannon. These had been introduced into England about 1330, and were used at Cambrai 1339 and at Crécy 1346. The earliest were made of bronze, but later iron was used. The cannon was not in one piece but made like a barrel with staves and hoops; it was loaded from the breech and the ammunition consisted of stone balls, for iron ones were not used till the end of the fifteenth century. Such a weapon must have been very uncertain in action and 'the life of a gun in the fifteenth century seems to have been short, that of the gunner precarious'.<sup>2</sup> In 1543 a method of casting cannon in one piece and boring them was devised and a new era of gunnery set in. The working of the bellows by water-power was first used for iron-smelting in the fifteenth century and the price of iron was double that in 1348.

A. S. Green, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century*, vol. ii. 109.

\* L. F. Salzman, *English Industries of the Middle Ages*, p. 110.

3. **LEAD AND TIN.** The lead industry remained much the same throughout the period, while the tin trade suffered badly from the effects of the Black Death and did not recover till the sixteenth century.

4. **QUARRYING.** Slates were first used in the fourteenth century, and alabaster became fashionable about the same time. In 1367 £200 was paid for an alabaster robedos for St. George's, Windsor. The centre for it was Nottingham and the stone was exported. Purbeck continued an important centre for stone-



BREWING

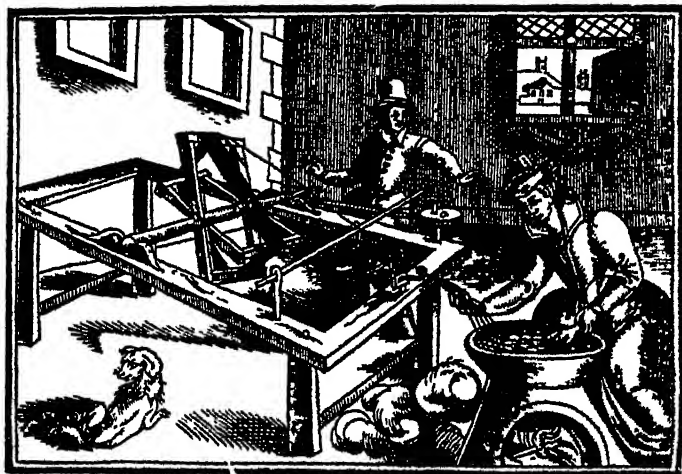
work, and in the sixteenth century the marblers and stone-cutters of that place formed a company, to which women were admissible.

5. **METAL WORK.** There was a great increase of plate during the fifteenth century, much of the wealth of the rich being put into this form. Bellfounders were numerous, and their name persists in Billiter Street.

6. **POTTERY, &c.** Wall tiles were introduced in 1335, bricks late in the fourteenth century, floor tiles, common in the fourteenth, died out in the fifteenth and have only recently been revived. In the fifteenth century English glass was despised and we find Flemish glass being imported for Eton College.

7. BREWING. Ale was still the general drink, but beer was imported in small quantities from Flanders at the end of the fourteenth century. Its use did not become general for another 100 years. Ale brewing was still largely in the hands of women, and in 1419 there were 39 women livery members of the Brewers Company in London. Wine-making almost entirely ceased.

8. SILK. By the middle of the fourteenth century the silk-weavers of London were an organized body, composed appar-



WINDING OFF SILK FROM THE COCOONS

ently mainly of women. During the fifteenth century they appealed to the king for protection against alien competition, and in 1455 the importation of manufactured silk was forbidden. The petition is interesting; it states that 'before this time, many a worshipful woman within the said city have lived full honourably, and therewith many good households kept, and many gentlewomen and other in great number like as there now be more than a thousand have been drawn under them in learning the same craft and occupation',<sup>1</sup> yet now from competition of

<sup>1</sup> Rot. Parl. V, 325 a.

silk from Italy there was 'great idleness amongst young gentlewomen . . . and laying down of many good and notable households'.

**Summary.** 1. There had been an English woollen industry as early as the twelfth century, but it is to Edward III that we owe the impetus that eventually placed England at the head of the wool-manufacturing states. By inviting Flemish artisans to settle in England and by a policy, more or less consistent, of encouraging the export of cloth and limiting that of wool, he and his successors eventually drew from Flanders the monopoly of the manufacture and in the end superseded that country. This policy combined with and reacted on the contemporaneous movement for the conversion of arable land to pasture, and the two processes together converted England from a purely agricultural land to one having considerable manufactures.

2. The improvement of the processes of manufacture and its subdivision among many workers produced the capitalist and tended to break up the gild system which had hitherto controlled all industry. The same forces destroyed the originally democratic government of the gilds as of the towns, and concentrated the power of both bodies in the hands of a continually decreasing number of wealthy traders and manufacturers to the exclusion of the constantly increasing number of daily wage-earners and the destruction of the small master-craftsman.

3. The total prosperity of the nation undoubtedly increased greatly between 1300 and 1500, but at the same time inequalities of wealth became more marked, the mere wage-earner increased in number, the breakdown of the old system of protection was not followed by any successful new one to protect the weak against the strong, 'labour questions' began to appear, with, worse still, the early recruits of a pauper class, which rapidly became too numerous for existing charitable or municipal agencies to deal with.

### 3. War, Trade and Economics

THE fourteenth and fifteenth centuries form a period of war broken by scanty intervals of peace. The Hundred Years War with France brought nothing to either side and drained the resources of both combatants, while France bought victory at an even greater price than England paid for defeat. The earlier period of the contest is marked by the increase of luxury in England; war as usual gave an impetus to certain trades, employed any surplus workmen, and gave a career to those adventurous spirits who found little scope for their activities at home. The shipbuilders, the armourers, the victualling trades, the clothiers, in the fourteenth century even as in the twentieth, for a time did fine business. As the successful armies of Edward swept over northern France, and at first by twos and threes, and later by tens and hundreds, discharged soldiers found their way home, in days when 'loot' was often the only way of paying the warrior, the wealth and luxury of their rich enemy was transferred across the Channel. England itself, guarded by its narrow seas, escaped almost entirely the devastations of war. A few of her coast towns, like Rye, were burnt and her ships destroyed by raids from French harbours, but the country itself went on as usual, while the annexation of Calais gave England entire command of all the sea routes from northern to southern Europe. France, on the other hand, suffered for the best part of the hundred years all the horrors of a war on her own soil, aggravated by bands of mercenaries and companies, who, while they sold their services to the highest bidder, harried equally under both flags the unfortunate land over which they fought. So serious was the disorder and devastation that the great fairs of Burgundy ceased and the French overland trade route was closed. Mediterranean trade found its way increasingly by sea, that sea of which Edward III claimed 'the sovereignty', though he did little to make the claim a reality.

We have seen that Edward III's commercial policy was not

consistent. In the main he seems to have desired to protect the home worker and to secure his supply of food, but there was another factor in the case. The pivot on which the French war turned was the co-operation of Flanders, and we find the English Government manipulating its wool and cloth duties accordingly. If Flanders needed coercing, then wool export was hindered or stopped; if persuasion seemed momentarily a better method, then the bales by which Flemish industry lived were released even at the cost of hampering native looms. Besides this the duty on wool was a considerable part of the royal income, and war is an expensive business. Edward could not always afford to forgo this tax, even to encourage home manufactures.

The business of finding the money for Edward's wars had a notable influence on English merchants. When the war broke out in 1337, Edward tried the experiment of working his business through the leading English traders. For the money he depended largely on a system of buying English wool under his royal right of purveyance and selling it in Flanders, but as this took time he gave it into the hands of the men who knew most about it. They failed him badly, either from incompetence or from a short-sighted attempt to raise prices, so the king turned to the great Lombard bankers. From them he borrowed largely and allowed them first of all to handle the wool export and then, when that was not sufficient, to farm the customs. The early years of the war were terribly expensive; Edward relied on foreign alliances secured by gifts of English money, and on mercenaries for his troops. The drain on the country was such that in order to pay his debts and obligations most of the sources of royal revenue were farmed by the king either to Lombard or Hanse merchants. Englishmen became more and more exasperated as they saw such power in the hands of detested aliens, and by 1340, when a truce was arranged, they began to feel strong enough to oppose the king's methods. In 1346, largely owing to the action of English merchants, the Lombard houses of the Bardi and the Peruzzi failed, and henceforth English merchants took their place in finding the king money. It is interesting to note that,



even in the Middle Ages, war was capable of affecting the financial stability of far-off neutral states. When Edward's inability to pay his debts to the Bardi caused the fall of the great Florentine house, it so shook the prosperity of Florence that that city never recovered its former financial position. Edward, too, had found foreign alliances costly and useless, while mercenaries were difficult to retain if ready cash were not at hand. Consequently he changed his plans and put the whole nation under arms by calling up every man holding land of the value of £5 and upwards, allowing, however, substitutes to be purchased. English merchants took the place of aliens and lent the necessary money, being repaid by assignments on the customs and other taxes. Thus the campaigns of Crécy and Calais were fought and managed by Englishmen alone, and in 1348 the credit of the leading merchants stood high and sure.

But the Black Death changed the situation ; the life of the whole nation was shaken to its foundation, and the merchants proved too weak to stand the shock. For some time a growing feeling against the English leaders of finance had manifested itself. Farming the taxes they had proved just as extortionate and selfish as any aliens, and the whole business had collected into the hands of a few rich contractors ; when the Black Death, with its consequent dearth of labour and hence of wool and every other source of taxation, made it impossible for them to meet their obligations, they fell as the Lombards fell.

At this juncture the king adopted a more sensible plan, which might have saved him much if he had used it fifteen years earlier. Instead of farming the customs either to aliens or to native merchants he administered them by means of paid officials, as is the modern practice. At the same time he removed the Staple to England, and so freed the sale of English wool from the restrictions and annoyances imposed on it by the jealousy of the Flemish towns. This threw the risk by sea on the foreign merchant who came for the wool, and made it impossible for the Flemish towns to injure the sale or force a monopoly of it for the leading towns of Bruges, Ghent, and Ypres.

The first part of the Hundred Years War, which ended at the Treaty of Bretigny in 1360, had thus two notable economic effects :

(a) It had taught the English a great deal about finance, both what to do and what not to do.

(b) It had helped to create the large capitalist, by giving scope to the activities of any who could get together a sufficient sum to stake on royal and national ventures.

During the earlier fifteenth century, the alliance between England and Burgundy caused consideration of the needs of Flanders, while in the latter part the support given by that country to the Yorkist cause brought about a cessation of commercial intercourse when the Lancastrians triumphed in 1485. Not till eleven years later did the far-seeing policy of Henry VII succeed in re-establishing it.

Connected with both war and trade was the system of piracy that prevailed. It will be remembered that one method of mutual protection resorted to by mediaeval towns was the seizure of a foreign merchant's goods to discharge the debt of another from the same town. This practice was gradually extended to the high seas and naturally led to fights and reprisals. Thus when Bordeaux merchants had their wines taken from them by Flemish pirates, they secured licence to seize the property of Flemish merchants in England. Such actions produced in the end a sort of private warfare, more or less licensed by the governments, between the merchants of Norway, Prussia, Flanders, England, Scotland, Spain, and Genoa. But besides this semi-recognized piracy, there were real pirates and plenty of them. As many as nine haunts of these rovers were cleared in 1408 from the mouth of the Ems. The English claim to the 'sovereignty of the seas' was not justified in the only way that could justify it, by policing them, and the nuisance remained unabated throughout the period. There was no navy; when the king wanted ships more than the Cinque Ports supplied to transport his soldiers he simply commandeered them and threw the cost on the town that supplied them. Towards the end of the

fourteenth century the burden became so great that, though Englishmen built ships, they sold them to aliens rather than take the risk of sailing them under the English flag.

The Wars of the Roses followed hard on the French wars, but their economic effect at the time was far less. This struggle was essentially feudal; it seems to have affected the towns but slightly and the traders as a class not at all. The town authorities seem to have adopted the policy of bowing to the power of the moment and buying forgiveness when fortune brought the other side to the top. On the whole they were Yorkist in sympathy, and Edward IV rewarded their support by shaping his policy to suit their views.

**The Beginnings of a Mercantilist Policy.** Edward III had been concerned mainly with the protection of the English worker and the securing of his food supplies. But from the time of the Good Parliament and Richard II, we find a more definite cry of England for the English. Restrictions on aliens were enforced, an attempt was made to encourage English shipbuilding by enacting in 1381 a NAVIGATION ACT forbidding English merchants to import or export goods except in English ships, and regulations were imposed to prevent the export of gold and silver. The alien question was not settled, as we shall see, for another two centuries. The Navigation Act failed for want of English ships, and the attempt to control the flow of money was not much more successful. It is not very likely that the government of Richard II had any very definite ideas of connexion between these three aspects of commerce, though the Navigation Act had something to do with the need for a navy. Each expedient was made to meet the needs of some one section of the nation, and was merely a transfer of the selfishness of mediaeval municipal policy to the nation as a whole. What current opinion of the fifteenth century judged the best basis for our national policy is seen in *The Libelle of English Policie* published in 1436. The fundamental business of England was to guard her commerce, while Providence drove into her lap the products of all lands, firmly seated on both sides of the narrow stormy Channel,

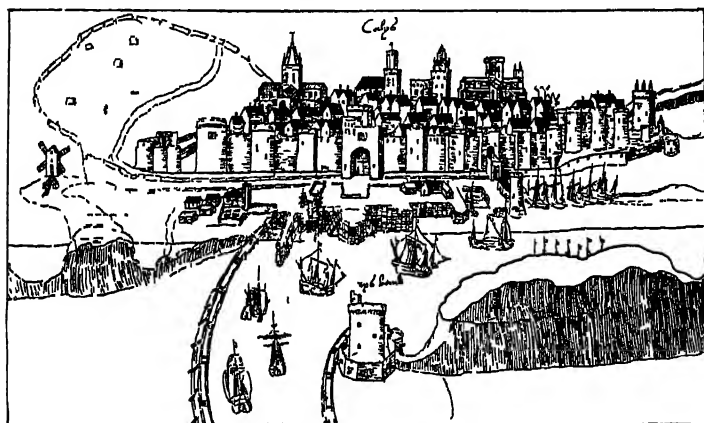
Dover and Calais gave her the keys of the world's trade ; she could take at will what she pleased, provided she held the seas. Thirty years later another 'little book' put forward the same view, this time for our industrial success. Seeing that to England all men must come either for wool or for cloth, we were 'by God's ordinance' destined first to supply our own needs and then by use of our monopoly 'to rule and govern all Christian



WARSHIP, about 1485.

kings'. Equally obvious was our duty to sell our goods as dear as we could, to keep the best wool for our own looms and so secure for our workers wealth and prosperity. In all this there is little suggestion of the mercantilist idea of using commerce to increase national power, rather the reverse. The writers have in their minds merely expedients for securing, as they thought at the expense of other nations, the wealth and happiness of Englishmen. For this end they were ready to interfere with and control both industry and commerce by endless regulation. Regulation had been municipal, it now was

becoming national, and its object would change as the national ambition changed. At present that ambition was, at its best, for a prosperous people within the sea-girt isle, at its worst, for the increase of wealth and power to the class that for the moment held the reins of government. But when the national ambition changed, as the world awoke to fresh horizons in the dawning sixteenth century, the policy required but little adapting for the new aim of a world-wide empire and a place in the sun'.



CALAIS TOWN AND HARBOUR

**The Alien Merchant.** During the thirteenth century most of the foreign trade of England was in the hands of aliens, whom the English merchant welcomed so long as they made no attempt to deal retail and were kept in a position entirely subordinate to the Englishman. We have seen how the alien tried to protect himself by making special bargains with the king,<sup>1</sup> and how in the case of great organizations like the Hanseatic League he succeeded. But with a parliament in which burgesses formed an influential part the monarch was forced often to consider their interests as well as his own revenue. England embarked on a policy, not merely of ousting the alien from her own markets,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 84

but even of encroaching on the alien's own. In the fifteenth century Flanders saw ruin at hand. Bruges in the thirteenth century had 40,000 looms, by 1500 it was almost deserted; Ypres, with a population in 1408 of over 80,000, of whom some 4,000 were clothworkers, in 1486 could muster but 6,000 inhabitants and less than 30 cloth factories. Attempts to shut out English cloth from Flemish markets were met by similar decrees in England, and England held the wool. In the fourteenth century Genoese merchants held the carrying trade of England, in the fifteenth English merchants were fighting Italians in the Levant for that of the Mediterranean. The struggle was bitter and unscrupulous. The story runs that near the end of the fourteenth century a Genoese merchant who offered, on conditions, to make Southampton the great western port for oriental produce on its road to Flanders and France, was murdered at his own door by order of great London traders. The first English ship to appear in the Levant was captured by Genoese rivals, and henceforth fierce fights heralded the opening of any new area to English commerce.

**The Merchant Adventurers.** Such an extension of enterprise called into existence a number of free-lance merchants, at first unorganized, who pushed their trade into every corner of the continental coast by any sort of means they could. At first they had swooped down on any area where the power of the earlier comers was weakening. Antwerp, forsaken by the Staplers, became a centre of their operations; in Bergen, left by the Hanseatic League, they set up their own market and for years held their own against fire and sword; Dantzic, where the league was losing ground, saw 300 ships of these English adventurers laden with cloth for all the markets of Prussia.

But by the end of the fourteenth century they too began to turn respectable and to desire to oust new-comers, and in 1406 Henry IV granted them a charter protecting them from 'other meddling merchants'. Gradually the tendency to join into Gilds or Companies drove them together, and various companies of Merchant Adventurers were formed in different areas, one in the Netherlands, others in Germany and Scandinavia.

It was, however, not to be expected that existing traders, lled with the monopolist ideas of the age, would sit quietly by and watch their markets invaded by these new-comers. Their rst enemy was the old organization of MERCHANT STAPLERS.



LADY DE COUCY LANDING AT BOULOGNE.

Showing costume of the fifteenth century.

The Staplers exported wool, the Merchant Adventurers manufactures. The latter wanted the wool kept in the country, the ormer found that the profits of manufacture were ruining the wool export of England. The Staplers claimed the right to export cloth also. Safely established in Antwerp, the Adventurers demanded that if the Staplers wished to sell cloth in their

markets, they must join the Adventurers Company and be subject to its laws and courts. The Staplers resisted and complained bitterly to English king and Burgundian duke, but the Adventurers went on their way undeterred by decree of king or council, and contemptuously told the Staplers to keep to Calais. Each year the trade in wool declined, that in manufactures increased—the Staple was doomed.

But the struggle with the HANSEATIC LEAGUE was more formidable. For 200 years the battle raged from Dantzic to Iceland. The Adventurers ran an illicit trade with Iceland, where the King of Norway, at the dictation of the League, forbade any ships but his own. Defying royal decrees, English as well as Norwegian, Bristol merchants, using the compass for the first recorded time in 1424, carried thither goods and returned with fish. Once the English seized 108 ships returning to Lübeck and Riga and the Hanse retaliated in kind. In 1469 open war broke out, members of the Steelyard were imprisoned and the corporation nearly destroyed; Bremen, Hamburg and Dantzic raised a fleet against England and, but for the sudden expulsion of Edward IV, would have attacked. Seeing their opportunity, Germans, Flemish and Dutch united to restore him, and his gratitude for this timely help placed, in 1474, the German Hanse at the pinnacle of its power in England. It was, however, only a final and not a permanent spurt. Laws passed in the interest of English merchants, such as that forbidding the import of silk or the export of undressed cloth, injured their trade; a policy of petty harassing by officials and perpetual public abuse broke up their business so that a member of the League dare hardly venture outside his fortified Steelyard. Other nations too were rising against their monopoly and, in 1478, the capture of Novgorod by the Muscovites and the destruction of its republican government disorganized the entire Eastern trade. Finally, Henry VII by long patient diplomacy united against them most of northern Europe and forced them to accept humiliating conditions.

But Englishmen were not contented with the trade of the



north only. The ruin of the Russian route, the decay of that of the Rhine or the Rhone, made the Mediterranean trade more valuable than ever. From 1440 the battle raged with the Genoese and the Venetians. Parliament, voicing the desires of England's merchants, tried to prevent the Italians trading in any wares but their own, and in spite of royal support they saw their privileges lessen one by one. Venice tried to keep her monopoly of wine, England retorted by setting up a monopoly of wool. Florence meanwhile, by a policy of free trade, began to hold her own again and welcomed English wool to her free port of Pisa. Henry VII concluded with her a treaty by which he guaranteed the delivery of enough wool for all Italy except Venice and received in return absolute freedom for English merchants in Florentine territory. Venetians tried in vain to retaliate, and in 1507 Henry allowed them to renew their charter in England only by giving up all the carrying trade between England and the Netherlands



HENRY VII

**Commercial Policy of Henry VII.** Henry VII was the first of our modern monarchs; in his hands the sovereign ceased to be a feudal overlord and became a national king. Wars for extension of territory he realized were profitless engagements, adding nothing to the wealth and happiness of the country nor even of the king. He turned his mind therefore to expansion of commerce, on which basis he hoped to build peace and prosperity. He was, however, handicapped somewhat in such a policy by the insecurity of his title to the throne. This particularly affected his relations with Flanders. His main purpose undoubtedly was to secure peace and goodwill between the two

*A Part of the STANDARD of Weights and Measures in the Exchequer—  
 Ann. 13 Henry Septim.*



*From the Original Table, formerly in the Treasury of the King's Exchequer*

countries, neither of which could do without the other. Flanders and Brabant, the market-place of Europe, were necessary to the English merchants for the sale of their wares ; without England's wool the Flemish looms lay idle and the people starved. But Margaret, Dowager Duchess of Burgundy, sister of Edward IV, was a persistent Yorkist and the centre of every plot to drive Henry from his throne. Commercial retaliation was resorted to in hope of inducing Maximilian to restrain the activities of his mother-in-law, and the English merchants suffered almost



THE TOWN BUSHEL, SOUTHAMPTON. Granted by Henry VII.

as much as the Flemish. The former were withdrawn from Antwerp, the latter expelled from England. For two years trade between the two countries ceased, but in 1496 a treaty of peace was signed which was known in later times as the INTERCURSUS MAGNUS. By this Philip of Flanders, Maximilian's son, who had now entered on his Burgundian inheritance, agreed to a restoration of all rights to English merchants such as they had possessed for fifty years, and Henry allowed them to return to Antwerp. Mutual and equal rights were conceded in each country to the merchants of the other, and neither prince was to shelter the other's rebellious subjects. If Margaret persisted in her support of the Yorkist cause, her grandson undertook to

deprive her of her dower lands. In 1499 Henry secured for English cloth freedom from all duties within the Burgundian dominions, except Flanders, and in 1506 he took advantage of Philip's being driven by a gale into an English port, while on his way to take up his wife's Spanish inheritance, to exact still more favourable terms, whereby Flanders also was opened to English cloth and the retail as well as the wholesale trade elsewhere. This was called by the Flemings the *MALUS INTERCURSUS*; but Philip's death next year put the power in the hands of his sister Margaret as regent for his son, and she repudiated the inequitable treaty, and the clause as to retail trading was withdrawn.

In pursuance of the same policy Henry worked for commercial treaties with places like Bordeaux, Denmark and Norway, Riga (to break the Baltic monopoly of the Hanseatic League), Florence, the Empire, France, Spain and Portugal. The last named became increasingly important as the Cape route to India more and more deflected from Italy the oriental trade, and Lisbon, instead of Venice, became the general port of trans-shipment. The treaties with Florence, by which he broke the Venetian carrying trade, have already been mentioned.

With the Hanse Henry was usually struggling, and he stuck manfully to the point that facilities for trade given to Germans in England should be balanced by similar facilities for English merchants in Baltic ports. He was not altogether successful in this, for from 1504 onwards he was impeded by the necessity of keeping the German free cities from harbouring Suffolk and his plots for the Crown.

But, while he worked steadily to support the enterprise of English merchants and to win markets for them, he also saw the necessity for a maritime state to do its own carrying trade. With this end in view he did everything in his power to encourage shipping, giving bounties for the construction of large ships, building the first dry dock at Portsmouth, and preventing foreign vessels from carrying English wool to the Netherlands. Two *NAVIGATION ACTS* were passed in 1485 and 1488, by which

ie from Guienne or Gascony and woad from Toulouse could y be imported in English ships, and merchants in England re not to load goods on foreign vessels if English were available. The policy of preventing a flow of money and precious metals t of the country was pursued and made more stringent. The t of 1478 was renewed in 1487, and later no foreigner might æ more than 10 crowns in cash from the country, while in 03 it was forbidden to export more than 6s. 8d. worth of illion, plate, or coin to Ireland.

Looking back a century later Bacon discerned in all these pedients of the first Tudor a new policy which his successors eveloped into a marvellous instrument for the aggrandizement ' the nation. It ' bowed the ancient policy of this realm from onsiderations of plenty to considerations of power '. But, as e have seen, no item of the policy was new, only the consistent pplication of them. It is doubtful if Henry aimed at more han securing a prosperous nation as a bulwark to his throne nd the dynasty he hoped to found. Before the end of his reign t was becoming more obvious that power followed commerce, ut there does not seem much to suggest that Henry encouraged ommerce as a means to power. That wealth was power he greatly understood, that to a monarch the want of money was the root of all evil he firmly believed, but there his vision stayed. Forces were at work which were to drive all Europe for nearly 400 years into a mad scramble for power, with commerce as its instrument ; the commercial policy of Henry no doubt helped England to take an early part in that scramble, but he neither foresaw it nor recognized its earliest symptoms—it was Spain and Portugal that divided the unknown world.

**Summary.** 1. The Hundred Years War was not so disastrous to England as to France, and in its early years it gave an impetus to trade and manufacture. The business of financing it, after some waste and fumbling, brought to the front Englishmen capable of handling large business and money affairs and helped the tendency, already appearing in the wool trade even in peace time, for money to accumulate in the hands of the few. War is

always a halcyon time for the capitalists as a class, even when it ruins some of its members.

2. War profoundly affected England's relations with Flanders, for the two countries were inextricably bound by commercial ties.

3. The Wars of the Roses had less economic effect than most civil wars, at the time. That they profoundly modified the events of the next century we shall see later.

4. State policy begins to take the place of municipal. Its chief points were :

(a) So to regulate trade that Englishmen might take full advantage of their position, climate, and products to secure for themselves the best of any bargain going.

(b) To keep within the realm an adequate supply of good coins, without which trade would flag.

(c) To seize markets in all parts of Europe wherever the flagging energy of rival alien merchants might give an opening.

5. The Staple Merchants gradually lost power, and their place was taken by a body of men who later organized themselves under the name of Merchant Adventurers.

6. Henry VII's policy was an extension and systematizing of that of his predecessors, but he placed commercial success in the first place and bent all his policy to secure for England full and free opportunities for trade. He was exceedingly successful, in spite of the handicap of a doubtful throne.

#### 4. The Mediaeval Church

THE story of the Church of the Middle Ages is, of course, a history in itself, but only certain aspects of that history concern us. Nor are we greatly occupied for our present purpose with its changes and developments. From the economic standpoint we need only ask three questions :

(a) How did the clergy live ? for they formed a much larger proportion of the population than now, and a very much more important one.

(b) How was poor relief managed in the centuries between the Norman conquest and the Reformation?

(c) What was the parish, and how far did its organization affect the people and their lives?

**Wealth and Responsibilities of the Church.** The collective wealth of the Church throughout these centuries was great. In the late fifteenth century it was reckoned by some that one-third of all the land was in the hands of priest or monk. On the other hand, this wealth was very unevenly distributed. The bishops, often the canons, and the large religious houses were wealthy landowners and feudal potentates, while the parish priest and the small community of monks and nuns lived lives little removed from that of the more easy villein or copyholder. All ranks found a home within the wide boundaries of Mother Church; she offered the one career open to talent, for a bishopric was not altogether outside the possible ambition of the peasant's son. But while the boy cowherd might dream not too wildly impossible dreams of wealth and power and dignity, if he enlisted as the pledged soldier of the faith of Jesus of Nazareth and of his earthly representative, Gregory VII or Alexander VI, he was perhaps more likely to end his days as a humble parish priest, on an income sufficient to keep him in simple comfort doing useful work as one of the chief men of his village. The differences of rank in the Church were as great as those in the State; the village priest was only slightly better educated and no better bred than the men whose souls he cared for, while the mitred abbot was a feudal lord who kept such state as a Bohun or a Courtenay might not surpass.

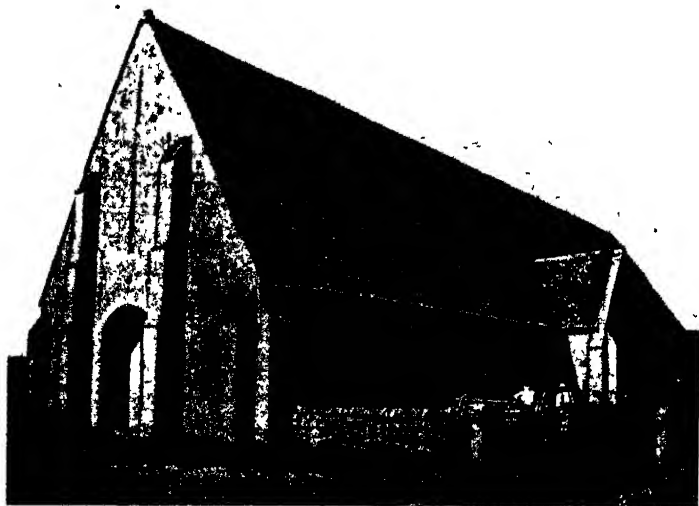
The wealth of the Church was drawn from three sources: endowed lands, tithe, gifts and offerings.

**CHURCH LAND**, which, as already mentioned, formed a considerable fraction of the country, was usually but not always held in frankalmoign.<sup>1</sup> Bishops and abbots, and even abbesses, often held their land by military tenure, most of them being tenants-in-chief of the Crown. In any case Church land fell,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 37.

quite simply, into the system of feudal tenure, even when the services paid for it were prayers for the soul instead of food for the body of the lord who gave it.

TITHE is, however, a far older thing than a feudal fief. From early Christian days the doctrine held that one-tenth of a man's goods was due to God, and the money so given was used for the relief of the sick and poor of the community. The payment



THE GREAT TITHE BARN, GREAT COXWELL

was enforced by church councils in 585 and 650, but in England it was not made imperative by secular law till 787. Originally not in any sense a land tax, in an age when from land was gleaned the only wealth it soon came to appear to be such, though the claim that a tenth of every source of man's wealth was due to his Maker, was made and maintained with varying degrees of success. Neither the fruits of commerce nor the professional man's income was considered exempt, at least by the Church. There was a division of the tithe into 'Great Tithes' of corn, wine, and wool, and 'Small Tithes' of vegetables, fruits, &c.



The tithe was not necessarily used in the parish in which it was raised, but in early days was handed over to the bishop to be used at his discretion. Later on it was allocated to special churches, but the idea of its general purpose for the whole diocese never quite died out. Originally it was divided into four parts, one for the bishop, one for the clergy, one for the church fabric, and one for the poor and sick. Later the bishop dropped out, and the tri-partite division was often ignored, but it never completely disappeared till the Reformation, and the relief of the poor was a moral if not a legal obligation on the receiver of the tithe.

**GIFTS AND OFFERINGS.** These were 'numerous and of every conceivable kind. There were fees for services, marriages, burials, masses, &c., and gifts at special periods of the year. All these, even when in a sense voluntary, were so customary that the custom amounted to compulsion.

**The Higher Clergy.** At the head of the Church officialdom were the archbishops and bishops. In speaking of them it will be well first to get a clear idea of the mediaeval view of a bishop's office. We now regard a bishopric as an office for the performance of some spiritual duties with an endowment of money or lands for the carrying out of these duties. In the Middle Ages a bishopric was a feudal fief with certain spiritual duties attached to it. If we remember this, Henry II's action in making Becket archbishop becomes more understandable. A bishopric was usually very rich, that of Winchester owned fifty manors, many of them large. On several of them were official residences between which the bishop moved 'transacting business as he went, checking the figures of his bailiffs, deciding judicially disputed questions, conferring the tonsure on this or that youth of promise or tenant's son, making inquiry into the troubles of unruly convents, whiling away a vacant hour by taking a run with the hounds or seeing the falcons fly, while the produce of the manor ~~day~~ appeared in the many mouths of men and horses. For as he travelled his train was numerous and his luggage bulky.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stephens and Hunt, *History of the English Church*, iii. 225.

Against this wealth and luxury must be set many expenses. To get elected had cost him large sums, both in the English and the Papal Courts. During the vacancy of the see the king claimed all the income, even to the stored and the standing corn. Thus the bishop entered office heavily in debt and it was a good many years before he had paid it off. His hospitality was

expected to be unlimited; custom decreed that he should combine the ostentation of a feudal baron and the reckless charity of a primitive Christian.

The election of bishops had originally, at least in theory, belonged to the clergy of the diocese. After the time of Henry I and Anselm the election was by the Cathedral chapter, but as it took place in one of the royal chapels the king's wishes were not easily defied. If any such attempt were made an appeal might be made to the Pope; Rome usually took such an opportunity to install a candidate of her own.

The cathedrals were either the conventual church of some great religious house, or collegiate churches with secular canons. Originally these canons were the bishop's council, but that ceased and the dean and chapter became largely independent of episcopal control. The property of a cathedral church served by canons was usually divided into three parts, one for the

bishop, one for the chapter as a whole, and the third divided into prebends which were the property of the individuals who held the stalls. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries non-residence became frequent and common life vanished. Marriage was not illegal, though forbidden by canon law, and it was not uncommon.

**The Monasteries.** These varied greatly in wealth and power. The largest held immense estates; some few abbots and abbesses held of the king by barony and ruled over a community number-



A MONK

ing some hundreds, of religious, laybrothers or sisters, servants and workpeople. The Abbot of Battle was supreme for three miles round his abbey. He and his monks had free warren in all lands of their manors, exemption from toll in all markets and on all roads passing through the king's lands, and the right to capture deer in royal forests through which they passed. The Church of Battle Abbey had the right of sanctuary, and its Abbot could pardon any condemned criminal he chanced to meet anywhere. It was a current saying of the age that if the Abbot of Glastonbury could have married the Abbess of Shaftesbury their son would have been wealthier than the king. At the other extreme was the small house, consisting of some four or five monks or nuns, who must often have been hard put to it not to starve.

The twelfth century was the time of the great foundations, by the late fifteenth the religious houses were struggling to keep what they had, while wealthy philanthropists turned their eyes towards municipal charity or patriotic ventures. The monasteries relied mainly on lands and tenements for their living, though gifts of all kinds were numerous, especially in certain districts.

One of their resources must by no means be overlooked. It became common for great lords to build and endow new churches and then hand them over to the management of a neighbouring monastery. Such churches were said to be *appropriated* to the religious house, which usually kept the great tithes and installed a vicar to carry out the duties, leaving him the small tithes and other minor payments. In later days the monks were accused of abusing their trust, of retaining the revenues and leaving the churches unserved. The charge has been disputed and it seems uncertain how far the evil really extended. As landlords the



A PARISH PRIEST

monks have been variously represented, by the one side as more tyrannous than any layman, by the other as fathers of the poor, dispensers of Christian charity, kindly lords of a loving and obedient peasantry. The truth seems on the whole to lie with the less kindly picture. We have seen how impossible the boroughs on monastic estates found it to free themselves, while sister towns were rising to freedom and opulence, and the hatred of the people in the Great Revolt is too evident to be ignored. It is probable, however, that while a reactionary church crushed all attempt at collective freedom on the part of its dependants, yet the relation between individuals was kindlier and more considerate. It was not usually the abbeys and priories that, seized by a ruthlessly commercial spirit, enclosed for sheep walks and cast out the labourer to starve. The type of mind that refuses justice but willingly gives charity is common in churches of every age and clime.

**The Parish Clergy.** There were three kinds of parish clergy, people whose business it was to minister to the spiritual needs of the district.

1. The **RECTORS** were priests of the parish churches whose incomes were drawn from the tithes, both great and small, from the offerings of parishioners and from glebe land, i. e. land belonging to the office and cultivated by the rector or later let at rent. They were quite comfortably off as a rule, though not wealthy. The duties attached to the office were not without expense. We have seen that in theory a third part of the tithe belonged to the poor, and this the rector who did his duty dispensed to the needy, the sick, and the wayfarer. Open hospitality to all comers was expected of him. Since it was not till the economic changes of the late fifteenth century that we find extreme poverty becoming a problem, we may conclude that the priests for the most part did perform this duty well. Possibly a good many 'undeserving poor' thereby got relief and were able to live more idly than nineteenth-century economists would approve, but taken all round the system seems to have met the needs of the society in which it worked. Of actual charges on

the rector's income the chief was the maintenance of the fabric of the chancel and of the ornaments and books.

2. VICARS. We have seen that many churches were appropriated to religious houses and that the monks paid a vicar to carry out the duties of parish priest. Sums were reserved out of the income for the vicar's use, and in the later centuries the bishops took care that these were adequate, and they also insisted that the vicar should have security of tenure. There was, however, considerable complaint, and the claim was made that the tithe of the parish should be spent in the parish. The claim never succeeded, for at the Dissolution the great tithes passed from the religious houses, not to the parish priests and the uses of religion, but to lay lords and private capitalists.

3. STIPENDIARY PRIESTS. These were salaried priests paid either to take the place of or to assist the vicar or rector. Non-residence became a scandal towards the end of the Middle Ages and stipendiary priests were in considerable demand. Their salary was some five or six marks a year, but after the Black Death it rose to £10 or more. The bishops, just like the lay lords, struggled to keep the wages down and to prevent the clergy migrating to sea-ports to be chaplains to rich merchants, or to the households of country squires. It reads strangely to hear of wealthy prelates inveighing against men who refuse to officiate in parish churches for six marks a year, and Archbishop Islip exhausting his vocabulary on 'the said priests, pampered with excessive salaries' whom he orders under penalties to accept five or six marks a year and no more. However, economic forces were too strong for the rectors and bishops and the poorer clergy got their £10 and sometimes even claimed £20.

All parish clergy increased their income by marriage fees, charges for baptism, masses for the dead, and other semi-voluntary gifts, while Easter and other dues often amounted to a considerable sum.

Besides the duties of hospitality and charity already referred to the parish clergy had to meet other claims :

1. Taxes, which they paid like the rest of the world. These were levied by Convocation not by Parliament.

2. Papal demands for tenths, Peter's pence, procurations for cardinals and others. These were often a grievous burden, and were greatly resented.

3. Irregular expenses, such as subscriptions to help newly-made bishops to pay their debts, the cost of visitations of bishops and archdeacons, the maintenance of proctors sent to Convocation.

**Poor Relief.** It will be well to sum up the chief methods devised in mediaeval times for the relief of the poor. There were three main sources of provision within the Church :

(a) The charity of the parish priest, one-third of whose tithes was regarded as being ear-marked for this purpose. It was, however, not a legal obligation and he could evade it if he chose.

(b) The somewhat promiscuous hospitality of the monasteries. The Church certainly inculcated discrimination, but the virtue of charity was rated so highly that prudence and common sense were apt to be lost sight of in the glow of virtue attaching to the merely generous gift. The result undoubtedly was the creation of the sturdy vagabond, the idler who found his pilgrimage from monastery to monastery quite profitable and more pleasant than that of his modern descendant who wanders from one casual ward to the next. Opinions, however, vary as to the extent of the evil ; the unemployed, who rapidly become the unemployable, were not sufficiently numerous to trouble either municipality or state before the late fifteenth century, so one feels that the changes of social organization rather than a too pitying indiscriminate charity were at the root of the trouble. There are some who maintain that monastic charity was getting less and less in the fifteenth century ; be that as it may, there is no question that in earlier ages the monasteries fulfilled in this matter a great social need in a way that suited the age they lived in. In wild and desolate places they were havens of refuge to the traveller, as to all the weak and unprotected.

(c) Mediaeval Hospitals. Over 750 of these are known to have existed. They consisted of —

(i) Homes for the sick, especially lepers. This terrible disease



A MEDIAEVAL HOSPITAL ST. CROSS, WINCHESTER

of leprosy was prevalent in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, began to lessen in the thirteenth and practically died out in the fourteenth. At one time there were over 200 leper hospitals. In early times lepers were not regarded as infectious, but later they were rigidly excluded from all social intercourse, even from the parish churches. There were other hospitals for the sick besides lepers, and most monasteries received and tended a few cases.

(ii) Hospitals for wayfarers were common in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These were mainly for the use of pilgrims. They declined in the fourteenth and fifteenth as pilgrimages became less fashionable, but there were always shelters for travellers in the north and at sea-ports.

(iii) Homes for the feeble and destitute also existed.

All of these hospitals were semi-religious communities, and were organized on the lines of a monastery. They were usually governed by wardens and the inmates were expected to lead the life of those devoted to religion as far as they were able. They were maintained by endowment, by legacies and gifts, often of lands and rents. Sometimes they received grants of fairs, as in the cases of St. Bartholomew's Fair and of the May Fair of St. James's Leper House. But all except the richest were dependent partly on casual charity. Even in early times some were controlled by the municipalities, and during the fifteenth century this method of control increased. Many were connected with the religious and craft gilds. They, however, decayed rapidly, sometimes owing to neglect on the part of the monasteries to which they were attached, but more often to bad administration by the wardens, who began to regard them as sinecures and mere sources of income.

Thus the main prop of the poor, the sick, and the destitute was undoubtedly the Church, but in the fifteenth century we find cases of the towns assuming charge of their own poor and making provision for them. We shall see later how the State eventually had to assume control.

**Parish Finance.** The parish was more than a mere ecclesiastical



division for organizing the clergy. It was a self-governing body of men and women for all sorts of purposes. It elected its own officials by direct vote of all adults male and female. These officials, called churchwardens, had very important and responsible duties. They might be and sometimes were women. In particular, on them fell the duty of keeping in repair the nave of the parish church, and they were by no means content to do the bare minimum. The parish took much pride in adorning and enriching its church, in providing beautiful and costly utensils and vestments, fine carvings and decorated windows. Gifts poured into the churchwardens' hands for such purposes. The various sources of the parish income were :

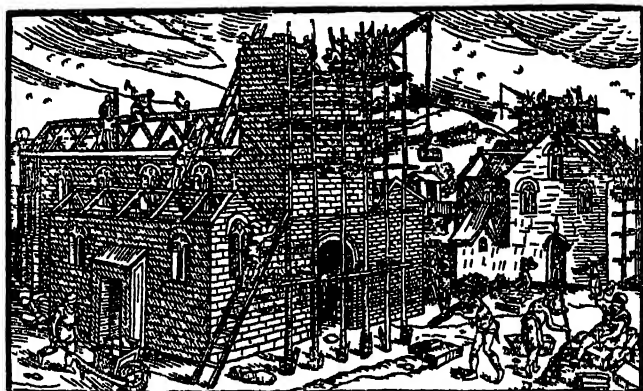
(a) Gifts of every kind, which were formed into the parish 'stock', or 'store'. These offerings were not from the rich, who, if they gave, gave endowments of lands or rents, but from the ordinary everyday folk. Rings, gowns, a ewer, three silver spoons, cows that might be hired out, sheep and even bees are among the gifts recorded. The stock was used, often hired out, as indeed were the church vestments; the use of the best processional cross could be had for payment, even sometimes jewels for a bride to wear. All this would be managed by the churchwardens, whose accounts, where still existing, help us to realize the life of the age.

(b) Sometimes the parishioners levied on themselves a rate, which though voluntary was cheerfully paid.

(c) Another method of raising money was by collections and collective gifts. If a church needed rebuilding, or the parish wished to beautify it, collections would be made among the youths, or the maidens, or the wives, or bands of these would sally forth into the roads or by the bridges and take toll of passers by. With the money raised they would set to work. A small committee would visit some town or village famed for some beautiful building or work of art and get ideas. They then bought the timber and carted it home, while local workmen hewed and cut and carved till the beautiful beams and stalls, that have come down to us, were swung and fitted into place.

Every item of expense was entered, such as twopence for 2 lb. of 'talowe for the carpenters', though the bill for that trade alone might be £31, or £300 at least of modern money. In the same way if new books were wanted, the parchment was bought, the scribe engaged to copy, and the bookbinder to make the finished whole. The parish church of the Middle Ages was very literally the work of the hands of those who worshipped in it.

(d) Church Ales were a popular, if not so satisfactory a way of raising money. They were the equivalent of the modern



BUILDING A CHURCH

bazaar. Ale was brewed in large quantities and given to the church, then the parishioners assembled and drank for 'the good of the house'—the more you drank the larger the profit to the church. Such a combination of pleasure and charity was as dear to Englishmen of that age as of this.

(e) One other item brought grist to the churchwardens' mill, viz. burial fees. It cost money to open a grave in the churchyard, more to open one in the church; the fees went to the parish fund.

**Women and the Church.** The position of women in the Middle Ages was affected greatly by the monastic system, but the career thus offered them varied in scope and importance through the

centuries. During the seventh and eighth centuries the profession of a religious life seems to have afforded a career and a position, at any rate to special women, not equalled in any later age. Many of the monasteries founded at that moment of religious enthusiasm were joint communities of men and women, ruled by women. These abbesses were frequently women of royal birth, often founders or liberal benefactors of the foundation, and the position they occupied was one of political and social power. Abbess Hild of Whitby, the best known of these ladies, made her community one of the most noted in Europe for learning, for art, for religion, and for statesmanship. The common wealth of the monastery was great, the nuns corresponded with learned men throughout Christendom and showed themselves no mean Latin scholars, Cædmon was the pride of the great abbey, while five of its monks became bishops. Secular learning too was not despised and the nuns were the craftswomen of an age when the beauty of English weaving and embroidery made it known and sought for on the Continent. Illumination of manuscripts, nursing of the sick, and farming on no small scale were among the occupations of the inhabitants. The abbesses of Saxon monasteries held lands as great thanes and were called to attend the Witenagemot. Hild's presidency of the great ecclesiastical synod of Whitby is too well known to need more than passing mention.

But between the eighth and the eleventh centuries there is a terrible blank. The inroads of the Danes and the subsidence of the wave of religious enthusiasm resulted in the decay and disappearance of many of the monastic houses. With the Normans came a revival, but never again did the women's houses take the old rank. When the houses were restored, too often it was for men alone; Whitby, Coldingham, Ely, Repton, Wimborne and many another revived, but as houses of monks alone. New houses founded for women were not given the dignity of the old. Most of them were priories, paying allegiance to a neighbouring house of monks or even to the rector of a parish. A few great abbeys for women persisted through the centuries—

Shaftesbury, Barking, and St. Mary's Winchester—with great ladies at their head who owed military service to the king and were summoned in due course to Parliament, but they were few in number. Most of the nunneries were small and far from wealthy, often in the fifteenth century so poor as to be within danger of starving the inmates. The new order of St. Gilbert of Sempringham, founded in the twelfth century and known as the Gilbertine Order, formed a kind of double monastery of nuns and canons, but it was never rich nor aristocratic. St. Gilbert seems to have founded it as a refuge for the poorer class of women, a function it served faithfully. At the time of the dissolution both monasteries and nunneries were in a state of decay. The charges of immorality and loose living, brought so freely by the commissioners, were certainly not substantiated in the case of the women religious, but there is no doubt that, either from poverty or mismanagement, many nunneries had ceased to be the busy and orderly hives of industry they had been in the past; religious enthusiasm was waning and the desire for community life less. Still, it is to be noted, the women quitted their convent life with regret, very few accepting the permission to return to the world. The pensions paid to the nuns are interesting and would be more so if we could know what relation they bore to the needs of the recipients. They varied from £200 paid to Alice Jordan, Abbess of Syon, who was a mere nominee of the king installed to carry out the surrender and whose large annuity suggests a bribe more than anything else, down to small sums of £1 and £2. Abbesses usually got about £26, the cases of large sums like £100 or £133 6s. 8d. being few. £5 or £6 to the prioress and from £1 to £3 for the rest are common sums. Probably it was possible to live on £2 a year, provided they had friends to go to.

The wealth of the nunneries was drawn from the same sources as that of the men's houses—lands, tenements, and titles of appropriated churches. The same claims of hospitality and charity were made on them and there is reason to believe these claims were duly met.

The religious houses fulfilled one function that lapsed entirely in the sixteenth till the late nineteenth century. The education of women was for the most part in their hands. How far it tended it is difficult to say, but it is certain that many of the daughters of the upper and middle classes were trained by nuns in such knowledge as the laity shared and in habits of right conduct and good breeding. It may have been a very inadequate training, but it was better than the nothing that was the girls' portion from the date of the Reformation till a time still within memory. The dissolution of the monasteries was probably for the nation a social and intellectual advance, for women it proved to be the closure of every avenue to a rational life for the unmarried, and a theft of endowments that had on the whole been for their welfare and for which no equivalent, not even a college at Oxford, was given them. In the age of rampant commercialism that followed, women like the poor found neither a living nor a calling.

## PART IV. 1500-1660

### 1. Rural England in the Sixteenth Century

WE have seen that the fifteenth century was on the whole a period of comparative prosperity for the dwellers in villages, and we must remember that villages then held the greater part of the population. We have also seen that towards the end of the century signs were appearing that new forces were at work, whose tendency seemed to be to depress some and exalt others, threatening indeed a serious disturbance of the equilibrium of the state. Before we follow out the working of these forces to their disastrous end, let us take a look at the countryside of 'merrie England' on the eve of the modern world.

**The Various Classes of the Rural Community.** Leaving aside for the moment the lord of the manor we will look at the condition of all those men whose status we have traced from the *liberi homines*, the *villani* and the *servi* of Domesday Book, through economic ups and downs to the dawn of the sixteenth century.

(a) First in importance, though small in number, are the **FREEHOLDERS**. They are now men of very varied economic position, but separated from other workers on the land by their privileged legal and political position. Some are men of substance, whose sons, if not themselves, are likely to join the ranks of country gentlemen or to become men of power and position as lawyers and state officials; many are mere peasants farming a few acres and living hardly by their personal toil. But they are the freest men in England, men with freedom in their blood, who for generations have 'looked the whole world in the face', owing no man anything. Most of them hold in free socage and the obligations of that tenure have long been of the slightest. Their rents have become negligible with the rising value of land, and much freehold land has managed to slip manorial control

altogether. The substantial yeoman of England, secure in the ownership of his land, living largely on the produce of it and of his own hands and living exceedingly well as far as food and clothing go, is the pride of the nation and the backbone of its independence. Besides this, the freeholder for generations has been used by the state in every conceivable kind of local government; he is a man whose eyes are on state affairs, who by the end of the fifteenth century has largely secured control of the public purse, who sits on juries where 'he cares not whom he displeaseth, so he pleaseth his own conscience'. The confining of the franchise to the 40s. freeholder by the Act of 1430 has given him an importance in the state out of all proportion to the extent of his acres or the number of his fellows. His legal security in the land he holds and his experience in courts enables him to defend himself against the storms that threaten him and to emerge in safety to a century of peace and prosperity. It was well for England that she then had men who, without being wealthy or powerful, were independent enough to resist oppression.

(b) THE CUSTOMARY TENANTS. But the bulk of the landholders of England are in a far more precarious position. Most of them are the descendants of those old villani and servi, who have gradually freed themselves from the manorial yoke up to a certain point; unfortunately the freeing process is not complete and during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it is to encounter a serious setback.

Lowest among these customary tenants at the opening of the sixteenth century we still find *VILLEINS BY BLOOD*, bondmen in legal status, though often well to do and prosperous. They are not numerous, probably only a few thousand, but they exist and we find them paying 'merchet' for leave to marry and 'chevage' for permission to live outside the manor, or sums amounting to hundreds of pounds to be quit for ever of the degrading obligations. They are all gone by the end of the sixteenth century, and are not of great importance during any part of it, but their existence shows the strength of survival and

illustrates forcibly the slowness of the death of manorial custom.

The COPYHOLDER holds his land by copy of the court roll and therefore has some security against being turned out, but the security falls short of certainty by a good deal. He is the descendant of the villein of the thirteenth century, and though the king's courts have recently taken to defending him against his lord, there is no one rule for the country. It all depends on the custom of the particular manor. If he can show that for a long time the custom has been for copyholds to descend from father to son, or that he holds for so many lives, he is fairly safe, or at least handicapped only as the poor man is in every age when it comes to legal action against a richer. Even then, unless there is a fixed custom of the manor as to the amount of fine to be paid when a holding changes hands, he may be driven from his land by an exorbitant demand. It is this question of insecurity of tenure that is the battle-ground of the sixteenth century.

As to his position economically, the copyholder is often a very well-to-do farmer, though he may be of any rank of wealth from the farmer of some hundreds of acres to a mere cottager with three or four.

The TENANT-AT-WILL is also a customary tenant and is of course in a precarious position.

The LEASEHOLDER is protected by his lease, but no further, and there is nothing to prevent the rent being raised at the end of the lease. Until 1530 the heir of the lord could repudiate the lease. The custom of fines has spread from copyhold to leasehold and a landlord can make the fine so high as to be impossible to the small man.

**The Custom of the Manor.** It will be well to inquire at this point what forces tended to protect the peasant in his coming struggle with the new type of landlord. His main defence lay in what was known as the 'custom of the manor'. This was a great deal more than anything we should imply by the term nowadays. It was unwritten law, handed on from generation to generation in each manor; it covered the minutest details



of village life, not merely the rules governing the relations between lord and peasant, the heriots, the fines, the rights of felling timber, grazing beasts, &c., but it determined even the doings of the villager himself, to whom he might leave his property, the rights of his wife to dower, or of the kin to guardianship. For some time too the king's courts of equity had been in the habit of deciding cases by inquiry into this 'custom' to which the parties appealed. We are in the habit of regarding 'custom' as an undesirable drag on the wheels of progress, as buttressing the vested interests of birth and wealth, rather than as the prop of the poor man fighting for his right to live. But in the sixteenth century it was the rich man who wanted change and progress, who found this 'custom of the manor' barring his path and who used his power in the expanding state to get rid of or at least to evade it. The struggle between 'custom' and the new 'business' ideals is the story of the sixteenth century.

In the meanwhile the position of the peasant was, and had been for a century, one of considerable prosperity. There had been signs of the coming changes, some oppression and misery had already appeared, but so far the majority of the villages of England were happy and prosperous. Of the peasant 'the picture we get is of an open-handed, turbulent, large-eating and deep-drinking people, much given to merriment both coarse and refined; according to modern standards very ignorant, yet capable of swift enthusiasm, litigious, great sticklers for their rights, quick to use force in defence of them, proud of their independence, and free from the grosser forms of poverty which crush the spirit'.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that the peasantry of England in that age were better off materially and consequently freer of spirit and more independent in character than that of neighbouring nations. Throughout the century the turbulence of the workers is a constant source of anxiety to the government. They rise again and again, to protect their fields from exploiting landlords, to fight for the old religion or to die for the new.

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 132.

How came it that this sturdy stock sank during the next three centuries to a level of physical and mental degradation which is now almost beyond belief? The story of what Thorold Rogers calls 'a conspiracy concocted by the law and carried out by parties interested in its success, to cheat the English workman of his wages, to tie him to the soil, to deprive him of hope, and to degrade him into irremediable poverty' has now to be told.

**Wool v. Corn.** We have already seen, in an earlier chapter, the field over which the first battle is to be fought. By the end of the fifteenth century the outcry against enclosures is already making itself heard. Let us review a little what we know of the causes

There were four different movements all resulting in what came to be known as 'enclosures', i. e. the fencing off of pieces of land each in the possession of one man and over which no one else had any rights.

(a) The first of these was a tendency to group together the strips of the open fields. It will be remembered that an ordinary villein's holding originally consisted of a number, often as many as thirty, of these strips, not lying side by side but scattered in all parts of the cultivated area. The early fifteenth century had been a time of prosperity to the peasantry, wages had risen, labour rents had been commuted for small money payments and it was not difficult for a thrifty man to save and prosper. With the possibility of keeping a plough team of his own and of paying the high rent demanded for meadow pasture, his rights in the open fields, of help with his ploughing and of pasture over the stubble, became of less value, and it would pay him better to get his strip by purchase or exchange together into one piece and keep it to himself. He would, of course, have to buy out the rights of his fellow villagers before he could actually enclose the land and this need kept the change from proceeding very fast, but there is evidence to show that through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries this consolidation of strips was going on. The old equality of possession was coming to an end and the rich copyholder appeared, farming, not 15 or 30 acres, but

over 100. The lords too rented their demesne land in larger parcels, usually on lease. Now this kind of enclosure is praised by the writers of the time. It produced much larger crops and could carry more stock than the open-field system at its best ; it did not greatly reduce the number of workers and so create unemployment, and it helped to build up a sturdier and more independent peasantry.

(b) The second movement was towards an increasing improvement (conversion to cultivation) of the waste. Surrounding every village was a large area of waste land, used in summer to pasture cattle and sheep and pigs under the care of the village herdsman. Now this waste land was an essential part of the village economy ; without it the farmer could hardly grow his corn, for to grow corn he must plough, to plough he must keep horses or oxen and must feed them. In the autumn for a short time he could turn them loose on the stubble of the reaped fields, but for the spring and summer he would need pasture land or he could not keep them alive. He eked out the profits of his strips of land by selling or using milk, butter, cheese and wool. For all this pasture land was essential. When the lords took to enclosing portions of the waste land, and the peasant found to his dismay that, unless he were a freeholder, he had no rights that the law courts would recognize, he raised a loud and not unjustified complaint. The lord was taking his commons, and without his common rights he could not live.

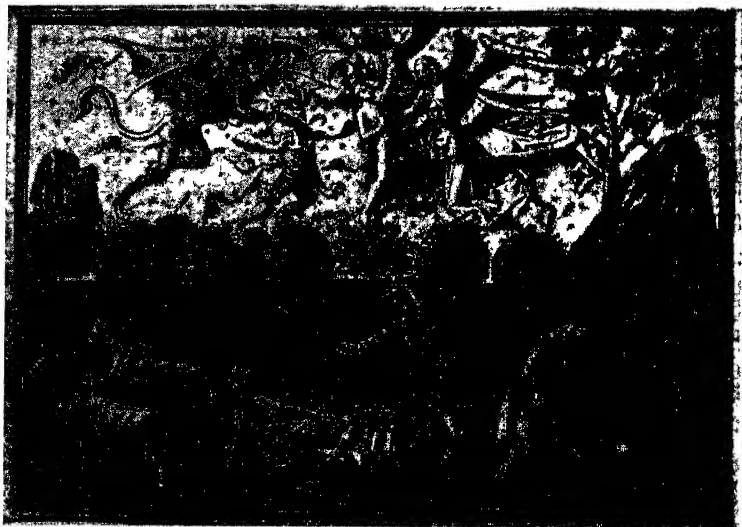
(c) We saw in Part III something of the cause that set the movement for enclosure for pasture in motion. Edward III's policy had given enormous impetus to the woollen industry and the demand for wool was insatiable. The landlord's position in the fifteenth century had not been easy ; in the sixteenth, with prices rising and rents almost stationary, it is not surprising that he took the easiest way of making up his income by enclosing both demesne and waste land to make large sheep runs. He did not take very much care of what happened to his unfortunate tenants deprived of their pasture, or of the labourers deprived of their employment. It was this sort of enclosure that produced

distress and was condemned by writers like More and preachers like Latimer.

(d) Sometimes the waste was enclosed for arable farming, and in this case though the copyholder suffered loss, or diminution, of his pasture rights, the labourer was not dispossessed or injured. Farming in this way was better and more productive than by the open-field system and is strongly advocated by writers on agriculture during the century, such as Fitzherbert and Tusser. The government, though it made repeated efforts to stop enclosure for pasture, had no objection to enclosure for arable and a good deal was actually carried out. Some historians hold that a very large fraction of the enclosures of the sixteenth century were of this latter kind, but it seems difficult to account for the constant complaint of contemporary writers, statesmen, and others, if that were so. That towards the end of the century there was increased corn growing is shown by the record that in spite of increasing population imported corn was not common and only for the use of London, while during the first thirty and last thirty years of the century the export increased rapidly. In some counties much of the enclosure was probably for arable, but that generally there was much distress caused by evictions for the creation of sheep runs seems certain. Tudor statesmen did not trouble about imaginary grievances, and undoubtedly they were gravely concerned at this particular discontent.

While we may join with the philanthropists of the age in condemning an economic change carried through without any consideration for the weaker and poorer members of the state, we must also recognize that open-field farming was clumsy, unproductive, and incapable of improvement. A system which allowed a few unenlightened villagers to prevent any changes, because they held that what was good enough for their fathers was good enough for them, was bound inevitably to break down. So little change could be made under it that early sixteenth-century farming differed little from that of the thirteenth and in some points was worse. The implements were the same, though cartwheels now had an iron rim; oxen still drew a heavy wooden plough, which had

perhaps a little more iron than before ; draining and manuring had not advanced, some manures like marl, soot and lime seem even to have fallen into disuse ; ewes were still milked. Other disadvantages of the system were the longer time of winter-feed owing to the lack of permanent pasture, and the necessity for all farmers breeding young animals at the same time and so bringing them to market all together. Where ground was enclosed



PLOUGHING AND DIGGING. Second half of fifteenth century.

the land yielded nearly double the amount of corn, and the weight of beasts was raised in like proportion. On the other hand, the greedy lords over-reached themselves in one direction. Sheep fattened on enclosed pastures were heavier and bigger, but their wool also grew coarser, and during the sixteenth century English wool ceased to be in demand abroad for the finer kinds of cloth. It was ousted by Spanish.

**Growth of London and its effect on Agriculture.** There was, however, another movement which did more in the long run to stop enclosures for pasture than any government action or

public denunciation. Between 1534 and 1634 the population of England, stationary for two centuries after the Great Pestilence rose 50 per cent., and that of London was multiplied five times. The feeding of the capital city during the latter part of the sixteenth century became a problem of national importance. In the chapter on Tudor government we shall see how this influenced the statesmen of the time and was a check on the too rapid development of a mercantile policy.

The increase of London's population was due to the expansion of its trade, which in the two centuries 1500-1700 rose from 40 per cent. to 80 per cent. of that of the whole nation. The situation caused a curious reversal of mediaeval policy; it became the business of the municipal government to attract corn to the city and for this purpose it fixed, not maximum prices as in the old days, but minimum. 'Whatsoever person that will bryng Whete or Rye good swete and merchaintable to this Citie to be sold shall have for every quarter of Whete xs and for every quarter of Rye 6s. 8d.' Non-citizens were free from toll if they brought corn, and foreign merchants encouraged to import it. Lastly, a regular system of storing was adopted and a large granary established at the Bridgehouse. From 1543-65 constant storage was made and the corn sold whenever the market supplies grew small. In 1578 the duty of keeping the granary full was handed over to the guilds, and the system only died out slowly during the seventeenth century.

It can easily be seen that the supply of a city holding 5 per cent. of the whole population of the country must have given a stimulus to corn growing. Up to 1500 London grew its own corn or drew it from its immediate neighbourhood, but during the sixteenth century its needs took it farther afield. Not only Kent and Berkshire were drawn on, but Suffolk, Norfolk, and even distant Yorkshire, with occasional contributions from Bristol or Newcastle. Lynn, in particular, which was the market centre for the great basin of the Ouse, sent increasing quantities to London; by 1600 it was shipping to the metropolis sometimes as much as 10,000 quarters in a year.

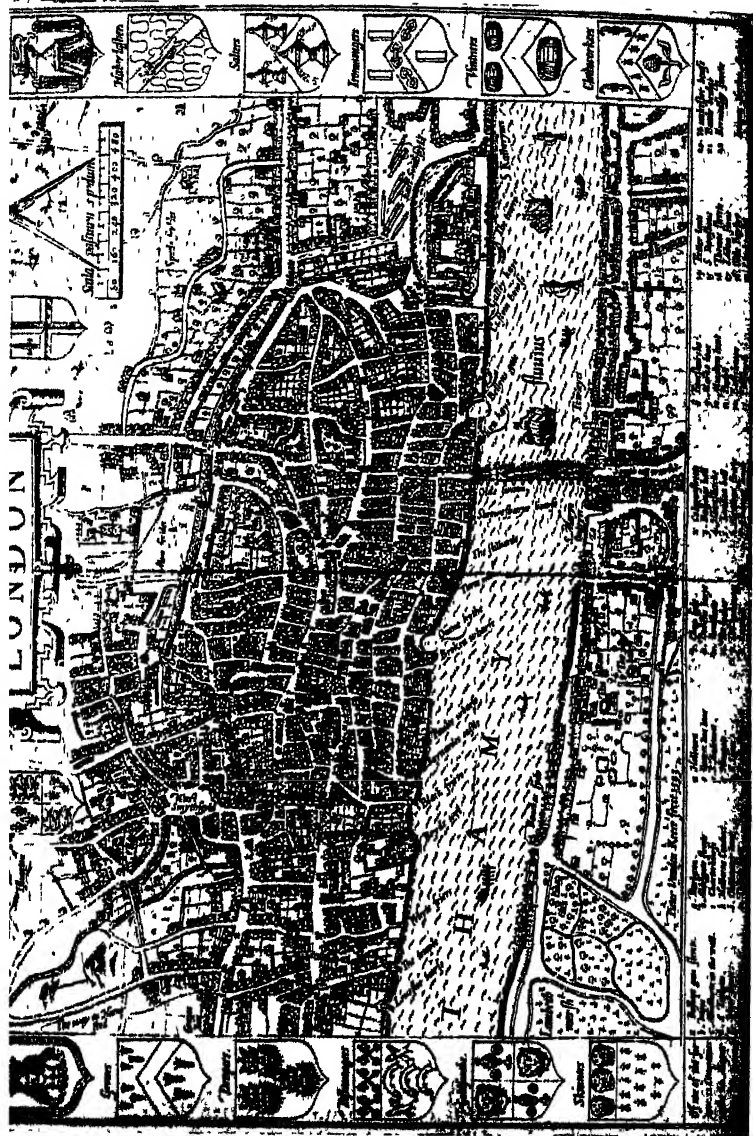
**The Rise of Prices.** There was another factor in the breaking up of the stability of rural society. From 1500 onwards we find steady, though at first gradual, rise in prices all round. Then soon after 1540 they rose rapidly so that the price of wheat was doubled. What was the main cause of this change is much disputed, but no one denies that two events were influential in



A BLACKSMITH

bringing it about: (a) the discovery of the silver mines of Mexico, (b) Henry VIII's debasement of the coinage.

An enormous increase in the quantity of silver in the world, in an age when coins were nearly all of that metal, was bound to lessen its value. Just as an overstocked market of geese and turkeys at Christmas will make them cheap, so an oversupply of silver makes it cheap. If the presence of more turkeys makes them worth fewer pieces of silver, the existence of more pieces of silver will make them worth less turkey or butter or corn. That is, prices go up. Throughout Europe this process was



NORDEN'S MAP OF LONDON, 1593



going on during the sixteenth century as Mexican and Peruvian silver filtered slowly east and north. People were puzzled, they did not understand ; everything got dearer and people got poorer, except a few obvious profiteers, who in some mysterious manner unknown to their fathers were piling up wealth.

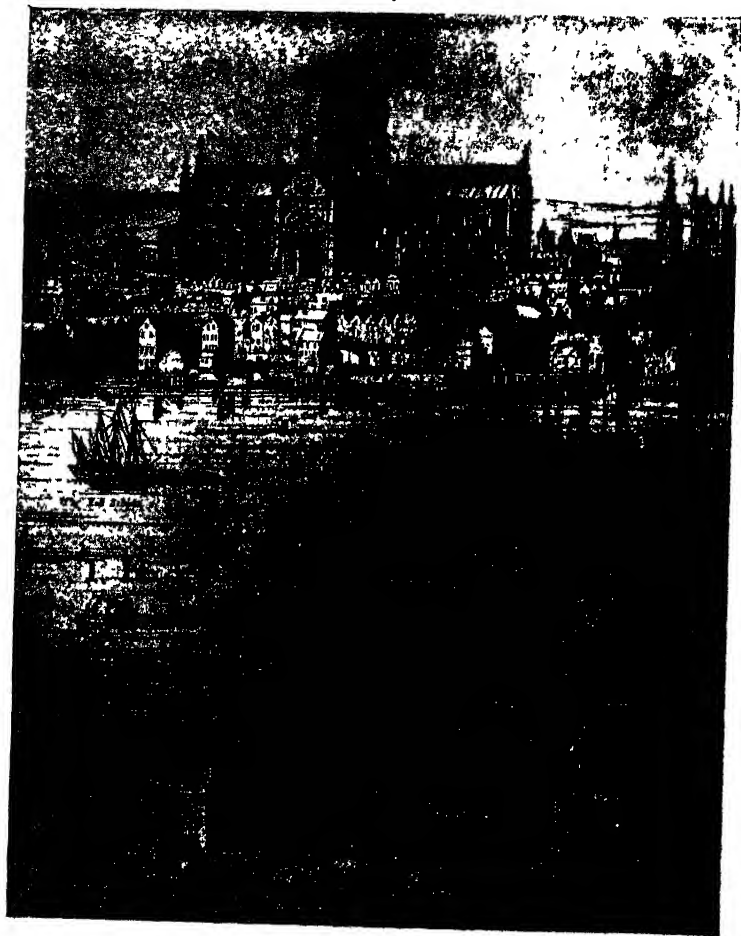
Ignorant of the forces at work or careless of anything but his own power and pleasure, Henry VIII in 1543 took measures that increased the trouble. He debased the coinage, i. e. he issued coins which, instead of 18 pennyweights of alloy in 12 ounces, the rest being silver, had 2 ounces of alloy in 12, and in 1546 as much as 8 ounces in 12 ; under Edward VI the real value of the shilling was less than 2½d. Now for a time a country can play these games with its coinage just as it can issue paper money and within its own borders nothing startling may happen. But England had considerable foreign trade and foreign merchants were not going to take 2½d. worth of silver and call it a shilling. In foreign exchange it is only the actual value of the metal which counts—the king's head on it has no longer any magic property. Hence prices of all imported goods rose rapidly and it was not long before home-made goods rose to meet them. The rich man and the landlord began to find his income curiously insufficient. A rent roll of £300 a year procured him only as much as he used to be able to buy for £200 ; something must be done. Many of his rents he could not alter, they had been fixed for centuries by the 'custom of the manor', but leaseholders and copyholders not by inheritance were at his mercy. He could refuse to renew leases except on greatly increased rents, he could increase the renewal fines to the limit of possible payment. Even the good landlord, anxious for the welfare of his tenants, was almost forced into some such deeds of oppression, for he often had to make those whom he could oppress pay for the immunity of those he could not. Land values were increasing and the freeholder or copyholder with fixed rent was making a good thing out of the rising market prices for his stock ; the 'unearned increment' was his and not his landlord's. To make up for this the lord raised the rent of

his leases often far above what increased prices might justify. He must either do this or be content with diminished income. Different men acted in different ways, some kindly, some tyrannous, but the old security and stability were gone.



OLD LONDON BRIDGE

But while the old ways had to be changed for the landlord and a more commercial spirit to dominate his actions, the wage labourer, whether in town or country, was more seriously affected. Prices rose rapidly and his wages, as is always the case, did not keep pace with them. At the beginning of the century an artisan in the country earned 3s. a week when wheat was at 4s. 0½d. the



ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, THE BEAR GARDEN AND THE  
GLOBE THEATRE

quarter. In 1533 he could earn 4s. a week, but wheat was 7s. 8d. the quarter. In 1564 his wages had risen to 9d. a day but wheat was 19s. 9½d. the quarter, by 1610 his wages were 10d. a day and wheat 40s. 4d. the quarter. The case of the unskilled labourer was worse. Rogers has estimated that while in 1495 fifteen weeks' work would provision his household for the year, by 1610 not even in fifty-two weeks, working every day except Sunday, would he achieve the same result. We must not forget either that wages were fixed by the employers and there was no appeal. The preambles to acts of parliament may express sympathy for the 'grief and burden of the poor labourer', but as the acts go on to place him at the mercy of the Justices of the Peace, who were all of the employer class, we may regard them as mere play to the gallery. Worse even than their attempts to keep down wages in the face of rising prices was their distortion of the conspiracy laws and of a law of Edward VI forbidding combination to force a rise in wages. We shall see later how the Law of Settlement completed the labourer's slavery.

**The Capitalist and the Unemployed.** Quite early in the sixteenth century the appearance of large numbers of unemployed is noted in every country in Europe. Times were changing, and while in the past the lords sought for labourers, the labourers were now being forced to seek for work. The causes of this change, that were common to all Europe, were :

(a) The break up of the feudal system and consequent disbanding of retainers. Louis XI in France, the great commercial towns of Germany, and Henry VII in England were all in one century asserting the dominance of law over force. Consequently large numbers of men-at-arms were turned out to prey on the public, for they were ignorant of any craft and despised husbandry.

(b) The rise of prices due to the introduction of Mexican silver was general and produced distress everywhere.

(c) Manufactures on a large scale were beginning to replace craft work, and the consequent ups and downs of trade, so well known in modern times but unheard of in the Middle Ages,

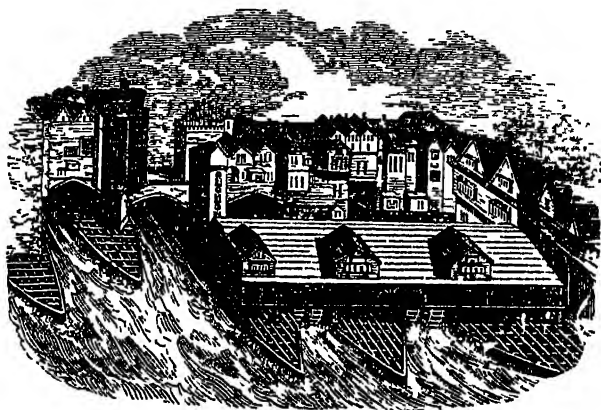
began to affect the worker, so that often he found himself with no work to do and faced with starvation.

Besides these three causes, common to the whole of Europe, England had two others peculiar to herself :

(a) The conversion of large tracts of land to sheep farming, which we have already described

(b) The dissolution of the monasteries and the religious gilds.

The dissolution caused the wildest speculation in land, and men who bought land as a commercial speculation expected it



THE BRIDGE HOUSE

to pay like any other investment of capital. It was this new type of landlord who did much of the enclosing and cared little for the families he displaced or the labourers he underpaid. The dissolution of the religious gilds, many of which were thrift societies, and the confiscations of every penny of their funds which could not be shown to be free from even a remotely religious object, added to the poverty and to the instability of the peasant class.

The result of all these combined events was the creation of a class of 'vagrom men', estimated by thousands even in early sixteenth-century writings, consisting not merely of the impotent

and diseased or of women and children driven from their homes, but of sturdy men capable and often willing to work, but for whom no work could be found. Naturally they became first a public nuisance and later a public scandal. 'Not only did they break into houses by night and pilfer the pig and the poultry, but they were daring enough to pass a hook through the windows and draw the clothes off sleeping men; to rob men on the highway who were travelling home from fairs, and to come by night to lonely houses and force the owners to deliver up what money they had on the premises'<sup>1</sup> Many migrated to the towns, and slums and their attendant evils became a serious problem for the civic fathers.

The Tudor peace helped on the accumulation of capital and the commercializing of land holding. In the centuries that went before land was of value according to the number of men it could support—a great lord was he whose estates supplied him with a small army. These lords were gone for good and evil, swallowed up in the suicidal wars of the Roses. The new men were of a different order. They were of two kinds, the business man out to make his land pay, and the courtier and absentee landlord who left his estate to a manager, but demanded a maximum income. Neither sort was propitious for the labourer or the tenant unprotected by law or custom. The rich merchant who invested in land treated it as he treated his merchandize, the men on it were only valuable if they produced profits, the cash connexion replaced the human tie. The human tie had not always been a kindly one; cruelty and oppression were common enough in an age of force, but the cruelty was a personal thing for which some one was responsible though he might be above punishment; the cruelties of a commercial age are too apt to be the result of forces but little understood, for which no individual is solely responsible and are all the more difficult to remedy. In the Middle Ages a man's affairs were everybody's business; his rights, his wrongs, his ill-luck or his evil doing were within public knowledge and public remedy. The sixteenth

<sup>1</sup> Leonard, *The Early History of English Poor Relief*, p. 12.

century brings in the age of the individual, the principle of 'every man for himself'. The strong took the best of everything equally in both ages, but in the earlier times society was so linked together that he was unable to repudiate all responsibility for the weak he exploited, while in the age just opening the bands were to be loosed and the sinister divorce of power and wealth from responsibility grow more and more frequent, till it culminated in the horrors of the industrial revolution.

The courtier and absentee landlord was no better, from the tenants' point of view, than the upstart merchant who believed that land should pay. It is well sometimes to remember that the Pembrokes, the Raleighs, the Grenvilles and the Herberts, immortalized by song, romance and adventure, were men who not only lived by estates carved out of prosperous monastic lands, often with repudiation of all the rights of tenants and labourers, but who either so drained these estates as to rouse the peasantry to rebellion or adopted the even simpler plan of evicting the villagers and enclosing the village. 'The brilliant age which begins with Elizabeth gleams against a background of social squalor and misery. The descendant of the illiterate, bloody-minded baron who is muzzled by Henry VII becomes a courteous gentleman who rhapsodizes in verse at the Court of Gloriana. But all that the peasants know is that his land-agents are harsher.'<sup>1</sup>

**Agrarian Discontent.** The result of all these changes was a widespread discontent. Throughout the century there were constant riots and risings of a more or less formidable nature. They are not indiscriminate murder and arson by hordes of starving peasants, but are nearly always organized, often very effectively so, and are led, not by adventurers with nothing to lose, but by men of substance who hold not unimportant offices. Sometimes the village is called out by its officers, the constable or the bailiff, to pull down fences or scatter sheep. It must be remembered too that the objects of the rioters were not revolutionary but conservative. It was the landlord who wanted

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 193.

changes and the peasant who resisted them. Nay, more, it was the landlords who were breaking the law, and the peasants who rioted to get it enforced. For the government, as we shall see in another chapter, had good reason in this case to support the poor against the rich. Every few years we find agrarian risings, some small, some great, some local, some extending through several counties. Ket's Rebellion in 1549 was only such a rising on a large scale. Even the Pilgrimage of Grace, though its cause



AN ELIZABETHIAN MANSION.  
Barlborough Hall, 1583-4.

was mainly the attack on the monasteries, had its agrarian side, and Aske asserted that enclosures were part of the discontent. The peasantry in fact were still independent enough to fight for what they conceived to be their rights, their claim to the farms held by their ancestors and their right to terms of tenure by which they could live. It was the upstart lord with his new-fangled ideas and utter carelessness of anything but his own comfort and pleasure that was the wrong and the innovation,

and the English peasant rose again and again to defend his land from the spoiler. That he failed in the end to protect himself against the new spirit was part of the price of that spiral advance that men call progress, and it was a heavy price. It turned 'merrie England' into a 'nation of shopkeepers', whose 'business principles' became accepted as a rule of life up to the eve of the Great War.

**Condition of the Wealthy.** Gloomy as is the picture of rural England shown above, destined to become gloomier as the centuries advance, there is a brighter aspect that must not be



forgotten. The advance in civilization made by the upper classes is a fact of supreme importance, though it has too often been treated as if it were the only fact of the century. Contrast the pictures handed down to us of Warwick the king-maker and of Sidney who wrote *Arcadia*, compare not only their minds but their outward aspect, the houses they lived in, their tastes, occupations and amusements. The gulf is nearly as wide as between George Washington and a Red Indian brave. It is only a century that lies between, but such a century as had only



A VILLAGE STREET

one precedent in history. We talk of the age of Pericles and of the age of Elizabeth and rightly, but we must also remember that the glories of both were built on marshy foundations; the slave and the 'rogue and vagabond' lived side by side with Pheidias and Shakespeare. Still the advance in material civilization of the well-to-do deserves attention. In rural England sprang up those beautiful mansions, the survivals of which are now so cherished. Round them too grew gardens, and the majority of our vegetables and many of our fruits date from the 'spacious days'. We have already noted the effect of a more scientific interest in farming and the improvements advocated by Fitzherbert, Tusser and others. The aggregate wealth of

England was undoubtedly increased; as peace and law and order grew, England became a land of beauty and of plenty. That the plenty reached too often the greedy hands of the few, that beauty and the means to lead a gracious life became the prerogative of the rich instead of the heritage of all, so mar the picture to twentieth-century eyes as almost to hide its beauties. Still it was an age of advance, though only to the vanguard of the nation.

**Summary.** 1. As the sixteenth century opened, the rural population of England was on the whole prosperous and contented, but this prosperity was not securely grounded. The bulk of the customary tenants were inadequately protected in the courts as to their rights in the land, and the wage-earner depended for his position on the continuance of a state of things in which the supply of labour was less than the demand. The freeholder and copyholder by inheritance with a fixed fine alone were in a position to resist the economic changes that were already threatening.

2. The growth of English wool manufacture and the consequent demand for wool tempted the landowner to stretch his legal rights to their utmost to enable him to overcome any 'customs' that stood in the way of his turning a number of small arable farms into sheep-runs. Hence arose much discontent and distress, which continued for three-quarters of the century.

There was also a movement to enclose for arable farming which was more productive and profitable thus than under the open-field system. There was less resistance to this as it did not throw men out of employment. It did, however, tend to deprive the ordinary customary tenant of his waste land.

3. Towards the end of the century and on to 1660 there was a demand for more corn and arable farming again became a profitable investment. This was largely due to the growth of London and some towns, caused by the great impetus given to trade.

4. The continuous rise of prices made matters difficult for all classes. The landlord found his income lessening, the wage-

earner that his real wages were diminishing almost to vanishing point. The only class which did not suffer was that of the small freeholder, who lived chiefly on the product of his own farm and sold merely his surplus.

5. These disintegrating forces at work produced on the one hand the capitalist who invested in land as a business speculation and the unemployed labourer who rapidly became the unemployable. Neither class was a benefit to the state. The capitalist heralded the modern industrial system and the eventual depopulation of the rural districts, the Elizabethan 'rogue and vagabond' was the forerunner of that terrible army that is the waste product of modern civilization, the elimination of which is still an unsolved problem.

6. The sixteenth century was an age of great advance for the fortunate classes, but their advance was bought by a relative retrogression of the bulk of the population which created a contrast of wealth and misery, of knowledge and ignorance, that was bound in the future to be a cause of bitterness and strife.

## 2. Industry and the Towns from 1500-1660

WE have seen that during the fifteenth century a profound change had begun in the organization of industry and of town life. The gild system was breaking down, the day of the capitalist had already dawned. During the next 150 years we have to trace this change until the general establishment of the new system, to mark an astounding rise in the apparent wealth of the nation, together with an ever-increasing concentration of riches and power in the hands of the few.

In the fourteenth century we saw the industry of England organized in a number of Craft Gilds, the members of which combined in each individual the work of maker and seller, the whole industry, from the raw material to the supplying of the finished article to the consumer, being controlled by the men of the craft. The master-craftsman worked with his apprentices

and journeymen, acted as their foreman, was at the same time their employer and sold the finished article to those who needed it. We have seen how gradually he dropped one function after another until by the beginning of the sixteenth century the journeymen were sharply distinguished from their employers and, after a short fight for freedom, were forced to subordinate their interests to those of the masters organized in the Livery Company. At the other end of the scale the craftsman was rapidly being deprived of his function as shopkeeper and the actual provision of the public was assumed by men who occupied themselves entirely with the commercial side of the business. Two kinds of capitalists thus appeared on the scene and the history of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is the story of their fight for control of the industry. On the one hand, the merchant capitalist controlled the market by which the craftsman could dispose of his wares; on the other, the successful craftsman could by dint of his capital affect the market by controlling production and starving out his smaller competitors. The two kinds of capital struggled for supremacy in almost every industry and the more complicated its process the more confused was the fight. The various branches of the cloth trade give perhaps the best illustration. Right up to the time of James I the bulk of English cloth was exported as 'white cloth', i.e. undyed and unfinished. It went to Flanders and France to be finished according to the taste of the foreign market. This suited the drapers and the merchants of cloth very well, but was by no means so pleasing to the Fullers and Shearmen, who, in London, combined about 1527, got themselves incorporated as the Clothworkers and set about designs to prevent this loss of possible work. They secured for a time the support of the government in suppressing the export of unfinished cloth and the battle went on throughout the century between them and the drapers. We find that as a whole in London the commercial interests predominated, but in provincial towns the industrial.

**Spread of Manufactures to the Country and the Suburbs.** We

have already noted that the exclusive policy of the guilds had driven enterprising capitalists to turn to the possibilities of the country districts, where the power of the gild ordinances did not extend. Thus all East Anglia became covered with little manufacturing villages where the employer could get cheap



A SHOEMAKER'S SHOP

labour without interference from the guilds. The guilds of the towns of course tried to get control of these illicit workers and were, as we shall see, supported by the government, but the attempt was only successful for a short time. The London suburbs grew in the same way. Craftsmen wishing to set up without the heavy expenses attaching to gild membership removed themselves across the river to Southwark or Bermondsey; aliens rejected by the short-sighted policy of the city authorities

settled at Spitalfields ; Whitechapel and St. Giles' were rapidly being built over. Within the city too were thousands of workers skilled and unskilled drawn thither by golden dreams of its wealth and luxury. The city fathers tried to get control of the suburban workers, but the capitalist interest was too strong for them ; the government, for its part, tried to stop the influx by forbidding the building of more houses and by pulling down slum dwellings. As a method of stopping an overcrowding that brought plague and pestilence such measures hardly strike one as showing foresight or statesmanship.

**The Gilds.** We left the gilds at the end of the fifteenth century organized into two parts, the masters of ' the clothing ' <sup>1</sup> and ' the yeomanry ', who consisted of journeymen and the smaller masters. Of these groups the second was entirely subordinate to the first. During the next century the yeomanry underwent a striking change. As the journeymen found it increasingly difficult to become masters and set up for themselves, they ceased to be content with the position of tutelage as resident servants in their master's house. They began to claim the right to take their work to their own homes, for they were no longer boys in their twenties and they desired to marry and live their own lives. Thus arose a new system by which they were paid by piecework done in their own homes. Such an arrangement is known as the ' DOMESTIC SYSTEM ', which still survives to-day in certain industries, mostly sweated. Now it is easily seen that an enterprising journeyman might take the step of adding to his earnings by buying a little raw material, working it up and selling the product on his own account. He would not be able, of course, to compete with the wealthy master for whom he worked, and would be dependent on the still wealthier merchant to dispose of his goods, but by degrees he might become a small master rather than a journeyman, himself employing perhaps an apprentice or a day worker, and this is what we find. By the end of the sixteenth century most of the ' yeomanry ' were small masters, not wage-labourers, and had succeeded to

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 132-5.

some extent in securing decent treatment from the wealthy controllers of the company. For the gild had taken on a new form and in the larger towns, and especially in London, had become an incorporated Livery Company. This was a very different thing from the Craft Gild of the thirteenth century. It consisted of the two parts, the Livery and the Yeomanry, and of these the Livery held all the power. It was entirely an oligarchy, ruled by wardens and a court of assistants, each new assistant or warden being chosen not by the general members of the company but by the existing governing body. Only the wealthy could aspire to office, for the expenses were heavy; the rank and file merely paid their dues and got protection when their interests did not happen to clash with those of the Livery. When they did so clash, the worker had no chance, for to combine to improve the conditions of their labour was illegal by an Act of 1548.

Perhaps the men who succeeded in thus securing control to the wealthy only thought they had also secured peace. If so, they were greatly mistaken. Economic forces had by now established such a division of labour that no gild or company stood alone, each was dependent on several others. Thus three crafts went to the making of a knife, the blacksmith's, the cutler's who fitted the handle, and the sheather's, while in the making of cloth each process was a craft in itself. The weaver depended on the spinner, the fuller and dyer on the weaver, and the draper on the fuller. At the same time the order could be reversed and all the others might be said to depend on the draper, who found the final market for the output of the rest. Each craft wanted the controlling position; each was in fact 'engaged in a constant struggle as to which of them should secure the economic advantage of standing between the rest and the market'.<sup>1</sup> But it must be emphasized that this struggle was between two or more sets of capitalists, they all alike excluded from any power the actual craftsman who made the things.

<sup>1</sup> G. Unwin, *Industrial Organization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, p. 96.

In the metropolis, owing to the 'custom of London' by which all freemen could work at any trade, the members of the Livery Company often had no connexion with their nominal craft; a member of the Fishmongers' Company might be a printer and yet free from the control of the Stationers' Company since he was not of their membership, while he was a governing member of his own Company, of the business of which he probably knew little or nothing. This custom seriously weakened the industrial element and helped to secure to the merchant class the dominance in every Company. Add to this the growing importance of the port of London as a commercial centre and the result of the contest between the two forms of capital is easily foreseen. In the provinces the industrial capitalist held his own better, with the result that trade concentrated in a few centres such as Bristol and Hull, whose powerful companies of merchants controlled all civic affairs.

**Incorporations of Small Masters. Joint-stock Enterprises. Monopolies.** But the world was moving fast in the sixteenth century and there was little stability in any economic arrangement. No sooner had the 'yeomanry' become a body of small masters in most skilled trades and the 'domestic system' been started, than these poorer members of the craft found themselves bound by pressure of need to look around for help against the rich manufacturer and merchant. They had secured the help of the government to limit the number of apprentices, whom the richer employers had begun to use as mere cheap labour, leaving skilled workers unemployed, but the Acts were steadily evaded. The big men of the trade were often accused of securing the best raw material and leaving the poor man with rubbish, for which however the merchant exacted full payment at the current price. For nearly 20 years three merchants, only one of whom was connected with the Leathersellers' Company, the other two being stationers by trade, held all the goats' and kids' leather in London. They often cut down the prices paid for piece-work and the small men had to accept them or go without a market for their skill. Attempts to regulate these evils within the



companies having failed, the small masters of the yeomanry began to entertain the idea of withdrawing and trying to gain incorporation separately. Their enterprise was helped by the fact that so many skilled trades were now conducted outside the city walls, and it was here the agitation began. The leather-workers succeeded after 25 years of complaint in getting incorporated as the glovers in 1638, and the feltmakers had taken about the same time to secure their independence in 1604



HENRY VIII CONFERRING A CHARTER UPON THE  
SURGEONS' COMPANY

The story of these last furnishes a good illustration of the course of events. The manufacture of felt hats on a large scale was introduced into England early in the sixteenth century by aliens from the Netherlands and Normandy. Gradually the English craftsmen learnt the new process and in 1576 the feltmakers asked for incorporation in order to regulate the trade. The haberdashers, who sold the hats to the public, claimed that the control was rightly theirs, and were successful in preventing the feltmakers' object. The next effort was to secure the appointment of a government official to control the trade, especially in the raw material, which the feltmakers declared

was often so bad as to be useless but that the haberdashers did not prevent this as they should, because many of them were interested in the supply themselves. They added that while rich feltmakers could force the merchants to sell good wool, the poorer ones were helpless. Constant efforts were made to induce the Haberdashers' Company to do properly the work they claimed the right to do, but always in vain if the law clashed with the members' interest. At last in 1604 the feltmakers obtained not only a charter but also an Act of Parliament, and rumour said the latter cost them £100 in bribery to a member.

In their efforts to protect themselves, the craftsmen had the support of the Government in the early seventeenth century. We shall say more about this in Chapter 4, here it need only be pointed out that the craftsmen regarded Government interference as a boon, and that there is ground for believing that there was a genuine desire on the part of the paternal despotism of the early Stuarts to help the poorer and weaker members of the state. But while all due credit may be given to their motives, their methods were open to serious abuse. The newly formed companies of small masters found themselves lacking in capital sufficient to meet the demands of the new commerce, and here the crown came to their help, directly or indirectly, usually the latter. A courtier with money to invest, a government contractor with the spoils of his last job idle on his hands, or a city merchant with a taste for speculation would offer to supply capital for the organization of the industry provided he and the Company could have exclusive rights. It might be that all he needed was an exclusion of foreign imports, or the suppression of rivals in other districts, but the essential was the elimination of competition. In return he paid the Government a yearly tax on his profits. The craftsmen hoped to benefit by the monopoly and also by the capitalist's power to supervise and order the trade in his and their interest. To the Government it seemed an excellent way of protecting the poor worker and at the same time bringing funds to a very empty treasury. On the other hand the consumer felt himself exploited, and with some justice.

Many of these conversions of incorporated companies into monopolies in the hands of single capitalists failed as speculations, for they depended too much on the exclusion of imported goods. This exclusion could rarely be effected, political and economic forces proved too strong. The most remarkable



A MERCHANT ENGAGED ON HIS ACCOUNTS

instance of this will be described later in dealing with the Cockayne scheme.

Monopolies, however, were not without their justification when they were merely used to introduce or encourage new arts or processes. In these cases they took the place of the modern patent and gave to an inventor the sole use of his invention for a term of years. The man who found the capital to start and

maintain a new or better process was doing public service and was rightly secured against failure for a time. This kind of monopoly injured no existing rights, nor competed with existing industries. But Stuart monopolies were not confined to these two ends, the use of the power of the crown to protect the worker, and the protection of new inventions against undue competition. The scheme was too useful to the Government to stop there, and monopolies of raw material like tin, of flourishing trades such as wine importation, or the manufacture of soap were injurious to worker and consumer alike. For many years the monopolists of pinmaking, working in the supposed interests of the craftsmen, tried to force on the English public badly made English pins in the place of good Dutch ones. This was a typical case, and the general public resented monopolies as a means of cheating the consumer and an encouragement of bad work and adulterated goods. Their abolition by the Long Parliament was the final triumph of a widespread agitation.

Another system of organization also arose out of the desire of the smaller masters to free themselves from the tyranny of those who held the raw material. Attempts were made by some of the incorporated crafts to find capital to buy a stock of raw material to be equally and fairly distributed among themselves. They found it difficult to raise enough within the Company and began to invite outside investors. Already there were models to copy from in the commercial and shipping world, where the joint-stock enterprise was to some extent established. For success in such a venture, besides the help of outside capital, a monopoly was also desirable, and sometimes the workers combined a co-operative venture with a dependence on some monopolist, hoping thereby to avoid the failure that too often attended the attempt of a co-operative enterprise to compete with the wealthy capitalist. The scheme did not work. The monopolist supplier of capital had little interest in maintaining the welfare of the worker and used his power in such a way as to lower and not raise the conditions of labour. The number of apprentices was increased and the cheap labour of women

and children substituted for that of the properly trained and skilled worker.

**Women and Children.** Something must be said of the position of women and children throughout this period, though there is considerable difficulty in discovering what really happened. In all times of rapid change the weak suffer most, and though we cannot trace the process clearly there is a marked change for the worse in the position of women at least. In the Middle Ages we have noted the definite position allotted in the gild to the widows and daughters of its members. The number of women gild members was much smaller than that of men, but their rights and duties seem to have been the same. By the late seventeenth century women have largely disappeared or remain on with inferior rights. We get an occasional glimpse of the coming change though not sufficient to trace its advent clearly. An attempt by men to capture the candle-making trade of York in 1615 failed, the mayor and aldermen insisting on licensing the women, but in the ordinances of the Berwick Gild in 1505, '11 and '15 the words including daughters as well as sons of freemen are crossed out by some hand of date unknown. In the fifteenth century the 'silkmen' were mainly women, in the seventeenth they seem to be all men. Even from the Brewers'

*31 Un Marchand de Londres de la rue C. S.*



AN ENGLISH HATTER

We Merchants can doe much, the world  
well knowes  
Our Pompe, our riches by our glorious  
showes.

Even from the Brewers'

Company the women gradually disappeared. Throughout the sixteenth century we get complaints that, in addition to employing more apprentices than they should, the wealthy members 'instructe wenches in their arte'. There was a large increase of unskilled labour in every trade, and women have always been liable to form the cheapest class of this worst exploited section of the industrial world. There are several reasons for this, which may be summed up by saying that women have other sources of income. Thus they add to their other work domestic labour in the home, whether as wife, daughter or mother, and indirectly supplement their outside wage. They earn part of their keep by other means than their trade wage and hence can be beaten down to accept sums below the level of subsistence. Protected by the gild system when in its prime, they were left helpless by the loosening forces of the changing world in a new era when competition, in ever-increasing fierceness, declared the supremacy of might and the survival of the greediest.

The new religion added its quota to the forces relegating them to an inferior position, and there was little hope for women to assert or protect themselves in an age when Milton wrote of Eve and John Knox preached against the monstrous rule of women. Although like the English agricultural labourer the women of the same stiff-necked race did not go under without protest, as the good citizens' wives showed when they stormed the House of Commons in 1642, the process of decay with both began in this period; it was more than two centuries before they reached the lowest level.

Of children in the sixteenth century it is still more difficult to know much. Life for them must have been hard, but it had been hard before; it certainly was to be harder later. There seems, however, to have been a real consciousness in all classes of the importance of children and a genuine care for their welfare, even if combined with a somewhat Spartan notion of the best training for them. But at least men aimed at giving them training, and much energy was spent on carrying out the laws as to apprenticeship, the training of the destitute, and the

establishment through apprenticeship of a real scheme of technical education. We must not blame too much a mistaken ideal of work and hatred of idleness that employed children of three years old on tasks that helped to earn their living. There seems no reason to think that there was deliberate intent to sacrifice the child for the industry, or to wear out little lives in the interest of money making. Men may have been more hypocritical in the sixteenth than in the twentieth century, though there seems no reason to suppose they were, but it would not have been possible then to have claimed openly the right of men and women to



COSTUME: PEASANTRY. Sixteenth century.

build their own fortunes and happiness on the misery and stunted minds of the next generation.

**The Changed Outlook.** All the changes that have been traced in the last pages show that the outlook of all classes of society was rapidly altering. In the industrial world there was no single event of catastrophic importance such as the revival of the study of Greek proved in the world of thought, the invention of printing in education, or the discovery of America in the realm of commerce. The change came in stages, which, however, arrived swiftly one after the other. Not that the widening of the horizon in the worlds of mind and of physical space was without effect on industry. The sudden expansion of ideas could not leave any class of society utterly untouched. Com-

merce naturally reacted on industry, enterprise in one demanded enterprise in the other. The connexion between the expansion of learning and that of industry would not perhaps appear so obvious, none the less their mutual influence was great. It will be remembered<sup>1</sup> that the Church had always claimed to control every aspect of men's lives and on no point did its voice speak more clearly than in matters of trade and industry. The mediaeval attitude towards usury originated with the Church and for centuries had behind it the whole weight of public opinion. Summed briefly it was this. *A man might only accept profit for the use of his money provided he shared the risk.* But the growth of wealth, and of opportunities for investment, forced the Church into various modifications of this rule, and by the end of the sixteenth century it was whittled down to a mere assertion that oppressive interest exacted from a poor man was unchristian. The success with which men challenged so old-established a morality as the Usury Laws was all part of the movement towards individual judgement, the original impetus of which sprang from the study of those great Greeks who analysed fearlessly all things in heaven and earth. When men dared to assert the right to think for themselves on matters of religion, it was obvious they would also claim the power to judge for themselves in matters of morality. Luther indeed held by the old ideals: son of a peasant, the hatred of the usurer was too deeply written within him for easy effacement, but Calvin's logical mind showed him clearly that it was nonsense to argue that money could not breed since it could buy land or flocks that did. He hesitated to break away entirely from the old restrictions, for he saw what would happen to the poor left at the mercy of the rich, but he drew the line between lawful and unlawful in exaction as between moderation and excess, not between risk and no risk. In this no doubt he voiced the current opinion of the age. Some of the stricter puritans tried to force back the world to the older rules and under Edward VI an attempt was made to prohibit both 'interest' and 'usury',

<sup>1</sup> See Part II, chap. 2, p. 74.





A PRINTING OFFICE OF ABOUT 1600

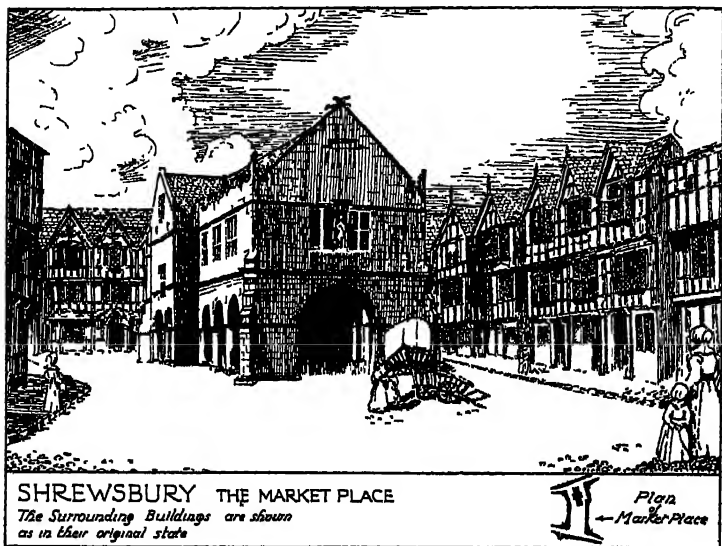
but most of the Acts of the century aim rather at preventing excessive rates.

The removal of the control of the Church in this matter together with the slackening of gild and municipal regulation justified to some extent the excessive interference of the central government, and, though the merchants might oppose, the general feeling of the more reputable elements of society approved its constant efforts to protect the worker against exploitation by ruthless 'business' methods.

But if, on the one hand, the industrial and commercial capitalist demanded and obtained more freedom to do as he willed with his own, he by no means wished to relinquish the tradition he had inherited from the Middle Ages of excluding others from his opportunities. Thus the merchants who traded with Spain under James I made bitter complaint of unauthorized rivals who competed with them, shopkeepers who sent out agents or manufacturers who tried to deal directly with the market instead of through the merchants. Worse still they did, anticipating the practice of certain pushing people of modern times, for they sold goods under cost price in order to get rid of inferior stock or to secure a reciprocal trade. For it was worth while to lose a little even on good English cloth, if they could fill their holds in return with wines and oils or, worst of all, that new and outrageous luxury tobacco! In like wise the Shrewsbury drapers tried to keep their monopoly of finishing the products of the looms of the Welsh villages in their hinterland, and bitterly resented the advent of the agents of the merchant exporter from London. Indeed, in industry as in religion men only asked freedom for themselves, they had no desire to give it to others.

There was, however, a change, an expansion. Just as in the Middle Ages town competed with town and jealously excluded its rivals, so now arose an international competition which became, by the time of James I, a conscious policy. Such sixteenth-century governments as could spare time from wars and religious feuds entered on a policy of encouragement of trade and of regulation of industry which definitely aimed at

the national welfare. The recovery of France under the administration of Henry IV, whose desire to see a fowl in every peasant's pot was a genuine aspiration, seemed to indicate that the true road to prosperity was centralized regulation. Not enough was allowed for the effect of peace and order after centuries of war and lawlessness or for the wonderful natural resources of the French dominions. Whatever the cause, a keen international



rivalry grew up to establish prosperity and power by means of industrial and commercial success, and the obvious way seemed to be a minute regulation by a paternal government. Experiments under Elizabeth were crystallized under the early Stuarts into a whole-hearted protectionist and mercantilist policy. Monopolies were only one aspect of it, the whole idea was to secure the welfare of England at the expense of her rivals. Every obstacle must be put in the way of trade that supplied work to foreign craftsmen, we must sell more than we bought and even force our inferior goods on reluctant aliens, if necessary

at the point of the sword. Such ideas were universal at the time and none seemed able to see that trade is a mutual game in which, for permanent success, both parties must gain equally.

**Aliens.** It will be well to inquire how, under the new order of things, aliens fared in this country. The mediaeval objection to 'foreigners', from the next county, was as we have seen breaking down under the new forces of centralized government and national feeling. To a certain extent the objection to aliens was also weakening, though there was no sentiment about the change, merely sound business principles. It began to be recognized that there were certain things that were made better on the Continent than in England and that it would be a good thing to learn these methods. And fortunately for us the misguided rulers of the Continent were at loggerheads with just those classes of their subjects who were most advanced industrially. Philip II successfully crushed freedom and with it prosperity in his own domain of Spain, but the burghers of the Netherlands were of stouter stuff. Under the persecutions of Alva many fled to a kinder shore and it was well for us that we had a Government far-seeing enough to insist on their reception. Had the desires of some of the less progressive towns prevailed, English industry would never have attained the place it won in the world's history. Our kings' policy of an open door, though it was often due to mere considerations of revenue, was in the long run very profitable to our nation. These refugees came from all parts and settled in many different districts. Walloon weavers settled in Glastonbury and Germans in Austin Friars in London. This happened in the reign of Edward VI and many more came under Elizabeth. It was Cecil's policy to encourage them. Colchester has the honour of being enlightened enough to welcome the strangers, who brought with them the crafts of needle and parchment making, as well as skill in the weaving of fine cloths, known as bays. It was this immigration of aliens that started the manufacture of the 'New Draperies' and revolutionized the whole cloth industry. It is not certain, but seems probable, that our great cotton industry is also a debt

to alien refugees. It had flourished at Antwerp and appears in Manchester just about the time of Antwerp's decline Brass-making, cutlery, and glass manufacture are also, by tradition, the result of alien instruction.

Another type of alien were the Crypto-Jews from Spain, who fled from the Inquisition during the reign of Elizabeth These



**INDIANS SMOKING** The first printed illustration of the use of the tobacco plant.

were traders, not craftsmen. Their importance lay in their command of money and consequent power to lend to the Government. During the Civil War they helped to finance the Parliamentary party. Anti-Semite agitations failed to oust them either under Cromwell or at the Restoration.

It must not be supposed though that aliens arrived here as they do now and found all trades and industries open to them.

They lived usually in colonies, exercised their arts by special licence and were quite definitely tolerated only because they were useful. The obligation of taking English apprentices was generally imposed on them so that their skill should be gradually diffused through the country. Only slowly were they merged in the general population. Merchants were not so welcome. It was as financiers that the Spanish Jews obtained a footing and foreign merchants were still penalized in many ways. The regular companies would have none of them, so they were confined to the less regulated trade. In 1578 the long agitation against the Hanse privileges ended in their abolition. The Merchant Adventurers had been obliged, owing to the breach with Spain, to remove their head-quarters from Antwerp to Hamburg. The Hanse stood them for ten years and then turned them out. Elizabeth retaliated by abolishing, in 1578, all their privileges in England. They were no longer necessary to the Crown, for English merchants were proving themselves well able to find money for the Government and line their own pockets at the same time.

The debt we owe to alien immigrants is so large that we may stop for a moment to consider how it was that they came here rather than elsewhere. There is no doubt that the chief cause was the fact that England, compared to the Continent, was at peace. A law-abiding man could count on conducting his business without a daily fear of ruin from invading armies. It was far otherwise abroad. Almost every country was torn by civil dissensions, or a powerful despot was trying to impose his religion or his politics on some unwilling small nation. Spain was bullying the Netherlands, in France Huguenots and Catholics were at each other's throats, Italy was the battle ground of every ambitious princeling with a fancy for claiming other people's dominions, while Germany was busy fomenting those political and religious differences among her princes and her towns that left her, in 1648, a desert for a century. It was no wonder that peace-loving burgesses migrated to a more restful atmosphere, where the Government seemed on the whole able to

keep serious unrest from breaking into open rebellion, and where even civil war was not the holocaust it seemed to be elsewhere.

But though the Government welcomed them, as did the wiser of the industrial class, there were certain difficulties in the situation. The rulers were very busy trying to organize the nation on stable lines and these new-comers did not always fit in. They had not fled from French or Spanish Catholicism to accept a compromise called the Anglican Church, into which Elizabeth and her advisers meant to force the bulk of the nation. Again, they might be poor and come on the rates, which a reluctant public was just beginning to pay for the relief of its own destitute ; it had no fancy to add pauper aliens to its charges. Lastly, they were mostly highly skilled artisans, and yet not subject to the rules of the home worker. The last factor was the most difficult to deal with and events like Evil May Day in 1517, when a number of aliens were killed by a mob, were repeated more than once. The usual plan was to organize them in colonies, and though this no doubt delayed their absorption into the nation, it was probably the best plan possible at the time.

**Changes in Special Industries.** During the period there were changes in certain industries that heralded the revolution of the next century. We have already noted the introduction of the manufacture of the finer kinds of finished cloths, chiefly by alien craftsmen, the beginnings of the cotton and the hardware industries. In connexion with this last was a very great change. The iron fields of the Middle Ages were Sussex, Kent, Surrey, Monmouth, and the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire. No successful method had yet been found of smelting iron except by charcoal, and the great forests of the Weald were nearing depletion. Consequently the industry grew in the west, and all the more rapidly that there at hand was coal as well as iron-ore. For although coal was still hardly used for smelting it was used to forge the iron into tools and hardware. Also, since the articles could be made in the same neighbourhood as the pigs of iron, transport was saved. Hence grew up an iron industry that spread up the Severn and through the coalfields of South

Staffordshire to Dudley, Wolverhampton and Birmingham, where it has stayed to this day. It was the first of many industries that were to follow the coalfields

**Summary.** 1. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the work of the craftsman became more and more split up between various persons, and two sorts of capitalists appeared, the merchant who concerned himself with selling the made goods and the manufacturer who employed many subordinates and produced on a large scale. These two types were rivals for the control of the whole industry. In London the merchant secured the power, in the provinces the manufacturer.



ANCIENT DRAPERS' HALL

2. The gilds during this period changed fundamentally. The journeymen became unimportant and the yeomanry consisted of small masters working in their homes, dependent on the big men for work and for raw material. In many cases the gild became an incorporated Livery Company with all power in the hands of the wealthy members, the constitution being entirely oligarchic and the governing body recruited by co-option.

3. Attempts on the part of the small masters to get some control over their means of livelihood led to fresh incorporations of new companies consisting of the poorer masters. These found themselves in dire need of capital, and in the effort to supply this arose monopolies and joint-stock enterprises—neither altogether successful and the former leading to serious abuses.



4. By the end of the period the industrial outlook had been revolutionized. Less and less consideration was paid to the general welfare, more and more the individual pursued his own profit, reckless what happened to the 'waste products of industry'. Among these must be classed, as well as the pauper and the vagabond, the unorganized women and, to some extent, the children

5 The growth of national rivalries caused a concentration of industrial regulation in the hands of the central government, and under the early Stuarts a definite policy of securing national power by industrial and commercial expansion was entered on.

6. The influx of aliens gave an impetus to our industries out of all proportion to their numbers. New crafts were introduced, old ones improved, and the cloth of England at last began to hold its own with the best in the continental markets. The wise foresight of a paternal government in refusing to yield to popular clamour to restrain the immigration was, in this case at least, entirely justified.

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### 3. Overseas Trade and England's Expansion

IN 1492 a Genoese sailor backed by the Spanish monarchy, thinking to find a new trade route to India, stumbled on a new world. There is no other event in history to compare with it in revolutionary result. The conquest of the air may perhaps prove as great an upheaval, but there is nothing in the past at all like it. For centuries men's minds had dwelt confined in a narrow physical boundary, the space within not all well known it is true, but still an old established tale. Suddenly, within a space of thirty years the size of the world doubled, almost limitless regions opened up for the enterprise of bold and hardy men, few things seemed improbable, nothing impossible. Rumours of lands of amazing fertility, where the little labour needed could be forced from reluctant but helpless savages, new products and promises of mineral wealth, culminated in stories

of gold and silver that made pale the wonders of the fabled east. Year after year came fresh tales of achievement in the teeth of dangers that might well appal, but only seemed to stimulate, the men of the new age. In 1499 Vasco de Gama returned from the first voyage to India round the Cape of Good Hope, and a year earlier Cabot had touched the mainland of America. In little over ten years the Portuguese were establishing themselves in India and the Moluccas, and Spain was making good her

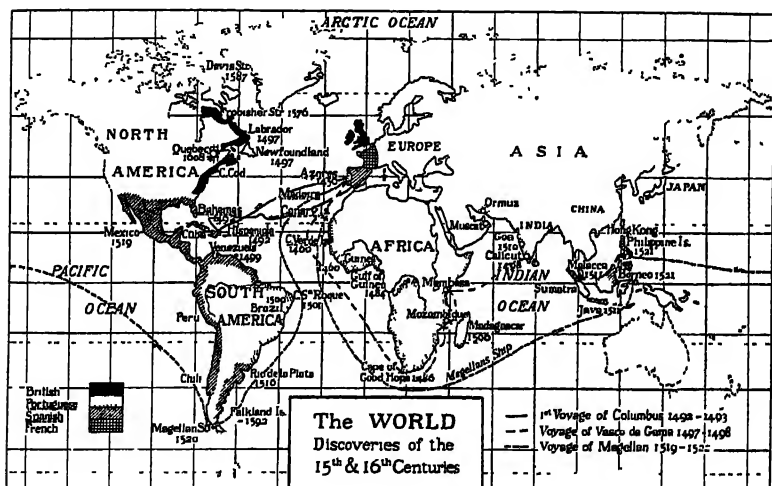


THE WESTERN WORLD as far as it was known at this date.

(Robert Thorne's map, 1527.)

claim to Central America. By 1520 Magellan was finding his way to the Pacific and Cortez was carrying Christianity and the sword to the heart of Mexico, while by 1527 Pizarro had blasted for ever the reputation of his country and his religion in the atrocities of Peru. But the warning as to what expansion might mean was lost in the dazzling glitter of El Dorado and the swelling stream of silver and gold seemed, by 1550, to place Spain on a pinnacle of material wealth and martial glory. In none of this was England sharing. In 1494 the Pope had divided the unknown world near the forty-fourth meridian, giving to

Portugal the east and to Spain the west. French Huguenot pirates alone disputed the monopoly of the two catholic nations. Though a few English merchants, like William Hawkins the elder, ventured to Guinea and Brazil, the majority kept to the old trade with Holland and Spain. But by 1550 the English temper was changing. Throughout the fifteenth century we have seen English merchants forcing their wares in every European port, defying the monopolies of Hansa and Venice alike,



and claiming to control the northern sea-route by right of the power of its gates at Dover and Calais. It was little likely that a monopoly based on a Papal decree would hold them back for long.

There were two possible policies ; the new world was large in fact and larger still in imagination, and the English might well find for themselves lands and trade routes as yet unoccupied. A north-east passage to India would balance the Portuguese one by the Cape, settlements in North America might prove as valuable as those farther south. In 1553 Sir John Willoughby failed to find his way through Arctic seas, but none the less the

expedition opened up a trade with Russia, who thus began her career as a European power. The settlements in North America were not to come yet. To the men of the sixteenth century trade was more attractive than colonization, and in ardent Protestants indignation at Papal assumptions was inextricably mixed with a desire to try a fall with a rival nation. Consequently we find the alternative policy of challenging Spain and Portugal's monopoly the more energetically pursued and, for a time, the more successful.

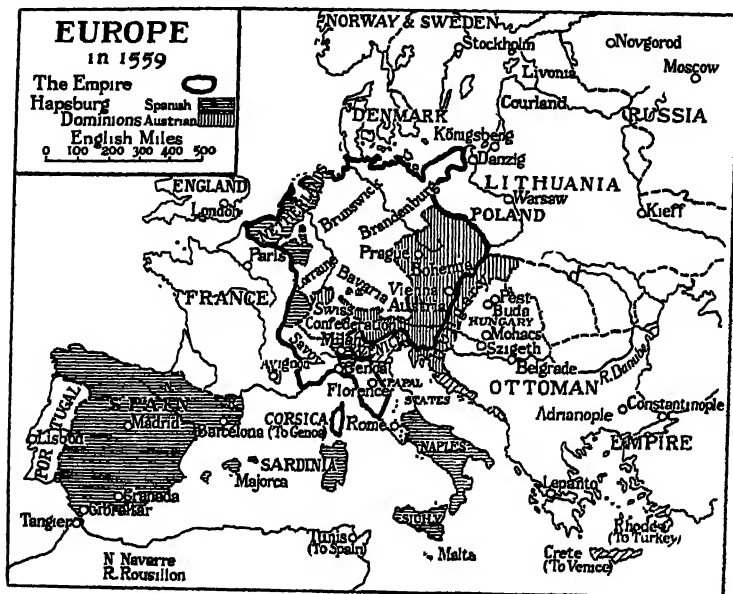


PHILIP II

At first the challenge was confined to the Portuguese possessions on the west coast of Africa. The old tradition of friendship with Burgundy, the power of Spain and the risk to the Netherlands trade if her enmity were roused, proved strong enough to keep English enterprise in check. But in 1562 John Hawkins set out with three small vessels, the largest only 120 tons, to assert the freedom of the seas against the might and prestige

of Spain. That his proposed merchandise was negro slaves, bought or kidnapped in Africa to be sold to Spanish colonists in Central America, is quite in keeping with the paradoxes of the age. The slave-trade was fifty years old, and seemed no more evil to Protestant and Bible-reading Hawkins than it did to Catholic priest or missionary. His success was immediate; he cajoled or bribed Spanish governors to wink at his proceedings and the colonists were only too anxious to trade. Sometimes by a display of force he gave the authorities the excuse of yielding to compulsion, but, however questionable his means, his object was honest trade, and these early stages of the great duel between Spain and England must be distinguished from the later less easily justified doings of Drake and his fellows. Hawkins always

maintained that his proceedings were legitimate, that Spain had no right to a monopoly of trade with its own colonies, and that freedom would mean benefit to both parties. Actually this was true, but as no nation recognized it for another 200 years, least of all England herself, it was not surprising that trade at the cannon's mouth soon led to open war. After the



treacherous murder in 1567, at San Juan de Ulua, English merchants and sailors entered on a period of open aggression, not always quite distinguishable from piracy.

It will be well to consider for a moment whether Philip's commercial policy and his political power to enforce it justified this attitude or even created it. Lord of Spain and the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, with considerable power of interference in North Italy owing to his possession of Milan, he was practically master of the Mediterranean trade; his Burgundian possessions included the great market of Europe, the cities of the Netherlands,

and put in his power the chief vent for English wool and undyed cloth. By his control of the mouth of the river he could block the trade of the Rhine. He seems to have desired to secure for his subjects the control of the trade of Europe, and to have taken measures with this object. His control of the new supplies of gold and silver, at a time when the possession of bullion was considered the determining factor in trade, as it undoubtedly was in war, made his power seem almost impregnable. Against this the English could only set their position commanding the main route between the two principal divisions of his kingdom, but this factor was sufficient to maintain official peace between the two countries for thirty years, in spite of depredations and reprisals that would each one have landed modern nations in immediate war. But when, in 1580, Philip by forceful annexation added the claims of Portugal to his own, it was high time for some one to dispute assumptions that threatened to be world-wide.

**Trade Organization in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries.** But before we follow farther the doings of the advanced scouts of England's great adventure, it will be well to see what the more sober section of the nation was doing. For the majority of our merchant princes were by no means so ready to risk either themselves or their country on wild-cat schemes, even though Drake himself should lead them and return with millions for himself and his partners. Consistently from first to last Cecil set his face against this policy of Walsingham, Drake, and Hawkins, and Elizabeth herself was far too cool and cautious to venture more than a secret share that might be repudiated at will. The cautious and wealthy citizens of London for the most part preferred slow increase along the old lines of regular and, if possible, monopolist trade. It is wrong, therefore, to think of the sixteenth century merely as a time 'more conveniently spacious' for ignoring established claims and securing individual desires. It is true that during this period individual interest tended to replace social welfare, but the process was as yet far from complete.

The gild forms of the Middle Ages still persisted, though often with strange modifications. Still the principal method of commercial undertaking was the controlled company. It took two forms, (1) the regulated company, (2) the joint-stock venture. In the **REGULATED COMPANY** the members traded each with his own capital, submitting to certain by-laws of the society and often under rules limiting quantity and quality of trade. But he took his own risks of capital, though he shared in the general upkeep of agents abroad and organized officials. The nearest analogy to the system at the present day is the Stock Exchange. A **JOINT-STOCK** enterprise was a different affair. In this several people combined to subscribe the capital, and shared the profits accordingly. Hawkins's and Drake's early ventures were of this kind, and the queen was often secretly a shareholder.

It was not essential that any given company should have a monopoly of trade in the area of its activities, but we find that this was their constant aim, and it will be well to examine the reasons for and against it. The origin of the companies of merchants lay no doubt in the need for mutual protection. Whether their market lay in civilized lands or in semi-savage areas the intruding alien could rely but little on the law to protect him. Unless he could combine in sufficient numbers to secure protection from the monarch or to defend himself by force, he had little chance of pushing his trade. We have already seen how in the Middle Ages attempts were made to fix on his fellow countryman the debts of a defaulting trader, and it was obvious that security could best be obtained by association and



FRANCIS DRAKE

common responsibility. But if a party of merchants, acting as a body, went to the expense and trouble of setting up agents, enforcing regulations, and protecting each other in foreign places, it seemed just that others should not step in and secure all these advantages without paying dues and sharing the burden. Consequently the members claimed that they alone should be allowed to carry on the particular trade. There was no great objection to this from merchants, provided that entrance was open and easy for all, but there was a strong tendency to make membership difficult and to secure for the few a monopoly by which they could hold the consumer to ransom. We find the cloth trade complaining that the merchant adventurers would not buy their cloth in sufficient quantities or only at low prices, in the one case thereby keeping up prices, in the other increasing their profits. The clothiers, in turn, to save themselves, either adulterated their wares or cut down wages. The joint-stock venture was in essence exclusive; when it extended to an entire district, as in the case of the East India Company, it became a close monopoly. No one could join unless an existing member were willing to sell his share. Such joint-stock companies, holding monopolies, are seen in modern times in railways, gas and water undertakings, and similar enterprises. In the sixteenth century, though there was considerable opposition, the regulation of trade was regarded as essential and the most reformers asked for was that regulated companies should have low entrance fees and should abstain from making 'corners' or 'rings' against the consumer.

We have already traced the rise of the chief of these companies, the MERCHANT ADVENTURERS. During the sixteenth century it controlled a large part of the trade of the country. In 1494 it had removed its head-quarters from Bruges to Antwerp, where it sold English cloth and bought German hardware that had come down the Rhine. Its presence contributed largely to the development of Antwerp, not only commercially but industrially, for the English undyed cloth was finished there by native artisans. In 1564 the Company was incorporated. Its members



were English merchants trading to certain specified parts. Care was taken to prevent their alienation, they could not marry an alien nor hold property abroad. Entrance was by apprenticeship (eight years), patrimony, or a heavy entrance fee. Many of its members were younger sons of the nobility. It had very great political and social influence, for it often financed the Crown, and under the astute guidance of Gresham held up the Spanish Armada for a year by delaying payment of Spanish bills drawn on the Bank of Genoa and so turning credit against Spain in the Netherlands. In the Civil War it found money for the Parliament. The king often used its governor or some important member as his representative abroad. It kept the seat of its government on the Continent, and its Governor and Court of Assistants controlled the local branches in other towns.

Antwerp did not remain their centre. Expelled thence they withdrew to Emden and Hamburg and kept their German trade in spite of all Philip's efforts to oust them. During the seventeenth century their privileges were constantly attacked, and eventually their exclusiveness was modified.

But though the Merchant Adventurers controlled the trade of the Rhine and the Elbe, there were regions further afield worth exploiting. In 1579 the EASTLAND COMPANY was chartered to develop the Baltic trade. Hither they brought English



GERMAN PEWTERERS

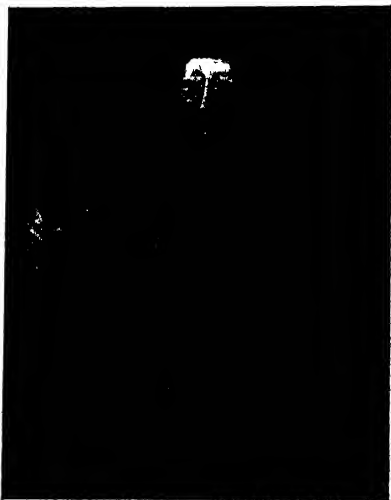
finished cloth and came back with tar, hemp, cordage, and all kinds of naval stores, besides timber which was needed owing to the approaching exhaustion of the English forests. They did not hold a monopoly and, though at first successful, were eventually ousted by the Dutch, who secured the Baltic corn trade and with it the rest.

In 1555 a company was chartered with a monopoly of trade with Russia. Sebastian Cabot was its first governor, and later it was known as the MUSCOVY COMPANY. Its power was in the hands of about fifteen members, and it had the high entrance fee of £60. It secured considerable privileges from Ivan the Terrible, and held the monopoly of the trade to Russia, Armenia, Media, the ancient Hyrcania, Persia, and the Caspian. It obtained Parliamentary sanction in 1556, with reservations as to Norway fisheries and certain merchants of York, Hull, Newcastle, and Boston. Commerce was to be exclusively in English ships with a majority of English sailors, and undressed cloths were not to be exported. Its exclusiveness called into existence numerous 'interlopers', who allied themselves with the Dutch and eventually ruined the company. The Dutch traded freely, and while the English company spent its energies trying to keep interlopers out and prices up, their astute neighbours secured not only the Russian trade but the whole fisheries of the north. By 1654 the total number of members had sunk from 207 to 55 and in 1697 its entrance fee was reduced to £5, and its monopoly practically ceased.

The TURKEY OR LEVANT COMPANY originated in 1581 with a seven years' monopoly of the trade. It exported English cloth and brought back raw silk, drugs, and general Eastern produce. It was never greatly prosperous, it competed with the French and Venetians, and in its principal import of raw silk was eventually supplanted by the East India Company. Its policy of trying to secure all the trade for the London members helped its competitors. It remained, however, in existence till 1753.

The organization with the most remarkable history is the EAST INDIA COMPANY. Founded in 1600 as a regulated company,

it held from the first a close monopoly and every voyage was a joint-stock enterprise, though not all members joined in each voyage. In 1612 a joint stock was created for the whole company, at first for a limited number of years. It was ruled by a governor and twenty-four assistants, and alone might trade with all islands and ports of Asia, Africa, and America from Cape of Good Hope to Magellan. It also held a licence to export bullion. Such a venture was a challenge to the Portuguese, who had settled in Goa in India since 1497, and to the Dutch, who claimed sole trade with the Spice Islands or Eastern Archipelago. In India the English Company thrived and during the seventeenth century founded factories at Surat, Madras, Hooghly near Calcutta, and Bombay. It secured privileges in Persia and even for ten years in Japan. But the Dutch put up a much more formidable opposition. Thorold Rogers has said 'More blood has been



SEBASTIAN CABOT

spilt over cloves than over some dynasties. More unforgiven injuries have been committed to secure a monopoly of this spice than over anything, except the monopoly of religious dogmas.' This may not be literally true, but the career of the East India Company was a stormy one from the beginning. In 1623 the Dutch did not stick at murder to drive the English from Amboyna and the neighbouring isles, and so fiercely did they fight the encroaching aliens that eventually they drove them completely from the islands. Besides the Dutch, the English Company had to face the usual trouble of 'interlopers' and often these were licensees of the Crown. At the end of the

seventeenth century there was much opposition to its monopoly, but in 1702 it was re-organized under Parliamentary sanction, a step very necessary since the Company had in many places assumed territorial sovereignty.

The controversy over the East Indian monopoly throws considerable light on the commercial ideas and practices of the age. It was attacked chiefly on the following grounds :

(1) That, since there was little market for English goods in the Far East, the merchants had to export bullion. According to the ideas of the time this tended to affect the balance of trade unfavourably for the home country.

(2) That the distance and danger of the voyages tended to keep ships and sailors away that might be needed for national defence.

(3) That it took away capital that would be better employed on the internal development of the country, e. g. on roads and the draining of marshes.

(4) That it only brought luxuries and supplied no raw material for English industries. (Silk could be got from the Levant.) The chief imports were spices and drugs, with saltpetre for ordnance.

(5) That its close monopoly and joint-stock enterprises put the power into the hands of a few men, who could and did fix prices to suit themselves without any consideration for the general public.

To these charges the defenders of the Company replied :

(1) That much of the bullion was recovered when they sold the Eastern produce to other nations, while there was some sale of English goods in the East so that the imports were not entirely paid for in gold and silver.

(2) That though it used ships and sailors, it thereby encouraged all maritime trades.

(3) That joint-stock enterprise was the only possible one in a trade demanding so much capital, that this method gave opportunity for investment to others who were not merchants, and that raw silk was cheaper brought by sea than by the overland route. These last three arguments were true. In 1617

a joint-stock subscription of over a million and a half sterling was put up by nearly 1,000 persons, including 15 peers and 13 peeresses, 82 knights, 18 widows and spinsters, 26 clergy and physicians, besides merchants and tradesmen.

The objection that loomed largest in the minds of the economists was the exporting of gold and silver, and the desire to avoid this led to the efforts to discover a north-west passage round North America and so a market for English goods in China. With the money obtained for these traders could go on and buy the spices and drugs of India.

Such were the principal trading companies founded before 1650, and theoretically at least they pretty well absorbed the trade routes of the world. But the monopoly was by no means as complete as it sounds. 'Interlopers' were everywhere and often whole groups of merchants secured independence from the orthodox companies. The merchants of Hull and Newcastle were free of the control of the Muscovy Company; the Merchant Adventurers of Newcastle and Exeter claimed to be separate from the general body and not amenable to their rules; Crown nominees held special licences of all kinds. In theory, only the French was open to all; practically, not a district or route was without its free-lances. Still no one in the seventeenth century desired unregulated trade, for in their eyes such freedom meant disorder and the influx of 'disorderly and unskilled' persons. What the reformers desired was regulated companies with a low admission fee, easily accessible to all. Joint stock they objected to, as placing all the power in the hands of a few large holders and thereby crushing initiative and enterprise. Regulation was probably necessary in the actual condition of law and order for trade to hold its own, but at the same time it probably held back enterprise and the pushing of new markets. It threw the power into the hands of the older and more established merchants, who took less risks, clung to old policies, and generally put extinguishers on youthful exuberance and adventure.

**Colonial Expansion.** England, the greatest colonizing nation since the Greeks, came late into the field. Not till the seven-

teenth century do we find her turning her mind overseas, a century nearly behind the pioneers. In 1603 she had no established foothold in Asia, Africa, or America. Attempts to plant Virginia had failed, and the only overseas interest she possessed was a small one in the fisheries of Newfoundland. In Ireland alone had she tried the new path, a bloodstained entry that we would fain forget. In few places perhaps was her road to empire other than over the liberties of weaker races, but only in Ireland was it built on wholesale massacre.

The following dates of the foundation of our principal colonies will give an idea of the work done in the seventeenth century. Even then the stories of two of the five nations do not begin till the eighteenth.

Newfoundland, 1583.	Carolina, 1629.
Barbadoes and } 1605-14.	Maryland, 1632.
Bermudas, }	Long Island, 1635.
Virginia, 1607.	Jamaica, 1655.
New England and } 1620-1.	New York, 1664.
Nova Scotia, }	Hudson's Bay, 1670.
Guiana, 1627.	Pennsylvania, 1682.
Antigua, Trinidad } 1627-30.	
and Bahamas, }	

#### Trading factories in :—

Gambia, 1630	Surat, 1609.
Gold Coast, 1660.	Madras, 1639.
Lagos, 1661.	Hooghly, 1650
St. Helena, 1651.	Bombay, 1665.

What were the causes of this movement of our people to lands beyond the sea? They may be divided between political, religious, and economic forces. Of these, the first played the least part, except in Ireland, where it predominated and where the movement was a terrible failure.

I. THE POLITICAL. The Government gave its support to

enterprises of colonization in America, largely as a possible check on Spanish ideas of world power. In Ireland it made a deliberate attempt to anglicize the laws, speech, and civilization of the native Irish, by dispersing throughout the land English colonists, who were to impose English speech and ways by degrees on all the inhabitants.

2. THE RELIGIOUS. The rivalry with Spain was due to religious as well as commercial and political forces. Nothing is more amazing than to read the sayings and writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century statesmen, soldiers, sailors, and merchants. Their minds were full of a strange jumble of commerce and religion, of genuinely religious motives at the back of horrible, even of dastardly deeds. They were fully convinced that every effort, however dubious in method, to crush the Spaniards, those 'children of the Devil', must be pleasing to God. We shall misinterpret two centuries of English history, if we fail to realize that on both sides, Catholic and Protestant, the strife was a new Crusade. The men who founded Virginia hoped not only for commercial results, they desired that it should 'hereafter tend to the Glory of his Divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian religion to such people as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true knowledge and Worship of God'. We wrong them and mistake the age, if we read such a declaration with an incredulous smile. The sixteenth is not the only century in which men have believed that they could at once serve both God and Mammon.

The same factor played its part too in another way. Several settlements owed their origin to religious refugees. The story of New England is well known; Maryland was founded in 1632 and became a refuge for Roman Catholics; Rhode Island and Pennsylvania (the latter founded by Quakers) were the result of efforts after still greater freedom.

3. THE ECONOMIC. These were mostly commercial. English traders encouraged the settlement of land which would produce products not so easily obtainable in European markets. Consequently in the southern parts of North America and in the

West Indies we find large tobacco and sugar estates worked by negro labour. Far from being self-supporting communities, they were largely dependent on the ships for necessities. The advantages to England were, that she thereby obtained things which otherwise must come from foreign nations, and so helped to keep the 'balance of trade' in her own favour; that it encouraged shipbuilding, attempts being made to force all the trade into English ships; lastly, the colonies provided markets for English goods. Emigration to take up homesteads was, however, not unknown and the northern states were settled in this way, often, as we have seen, by discontented religious or political rebels.

The early seventeenth century saw much unemployment; it was estimated to be as high as 30 per cent. in Sheffield in 1615, and emigration of labourers to some extent eased the situation. The colonies were used too as dumping ground for prisoners and undesirables generally, in spite of protests from the colonists. Criminals, prisoners of war, and inconvenient Irish were thus got rid of. Royalist prisoners after Worcester shared the fate with 2,000 Irish girls and boys deported by order of the Government. Kidnapping was not uncommon. Such emigrants were sold by auction, but they retained some legal rights. After five years' service they were free and might take up land. In Virginia their lot was not intolerable; in the West Indies it was very bad.

The government of these new lands underwent considerable change. The original grant of land was made to a company or a wealthy proprietor, who was responsible for all who went. But some form of self-government quickly arose, the colonists usually modelling themselves on what they had known in England, the Virginian large estates taking on a semi-feudal complexion, the small closely set holdings of the north becoming democratic townships.

The Crown found it difficult to control the companies, and the colonies managed their own affairs, subject to veto by the home Government. The chief cause of interference was its navigation policy. Charles I tried to make all colonial trade pass through English ports. This pressed heavily on Virginia and the West



Indies, much of whose trade was with the Dutch. The stubborn New England stock ignored the order, and few governors cared to enforce it. As their foreign trade was small, England did not greatly trouble. The owners of the Newfoundland fisheries were allowed to trade direct with the Mediterranean.

The wrongheadedness of our early ideas of colonization reached its highest pitch in Ireland. In newer lands the difficulties were less, since there was only a scanty and uncivilized population to displace. But in Ireland, before anything could be done, it was necessary to get room to do it, and the land was already occupied by a nation possessed of an alien culture, speech and law, who were strong enough to fight but not to fight successfully. Tired of exercising a merely nominal authority over a people who steadily refused to see the superiority of English law or English religion, the Tudor monarchs conceived the idea of anglicizing the Irish by means of English planters. Attempts were made in Munster and elsewhere by grants of land to individuals, who organized their estates on the lines of English manors and who regarded the Irish sept and its land tenure, its inheritance by gavelkind as a sort of moral disease. Tyrone's rebellion gave an opening for a more ambitious attempt, and a London company was chartered in 1613 to plant Ulster with military colonies. It was not very successful, for London speculators cared only to secure the best rents and so preferred Irish graziers to English and Scotch agriculturists. Above all, no provision had been made to dispose of the remnant of soldiery, and rebels who had escaped the massacres, which, though they spared neither man, woman, nor child, had still left a number of despairing and reckless outlaws. Whatever success the scheme achieved was blotted out by the revolt of 1641 and the re-conquest by Cromwell. Determined this time to do the business thoroughly, he set out to clear the land of all, English and Irish alike, whose loyalty to the new English régime was doubtful. All were ordered to move west of the Shannon, even the purely English citizens of Waterford and Kilkenny. Thousands were transported to the West Indies. But, like others, the Dictator found it was easy

to make a desert and call it peace, not so easy to replant that desert. Veteran soldiers, mostly of the trading class, did not make good agricultural colonists, and though many of the dispossessed Irish crept back to their homes as mere labourers, the claims of Cromwell's settlers blocked the way to any fresh settlement. The events of 1689 completed the chaos. The penal laws against the Catholics put every Romanist proprietor



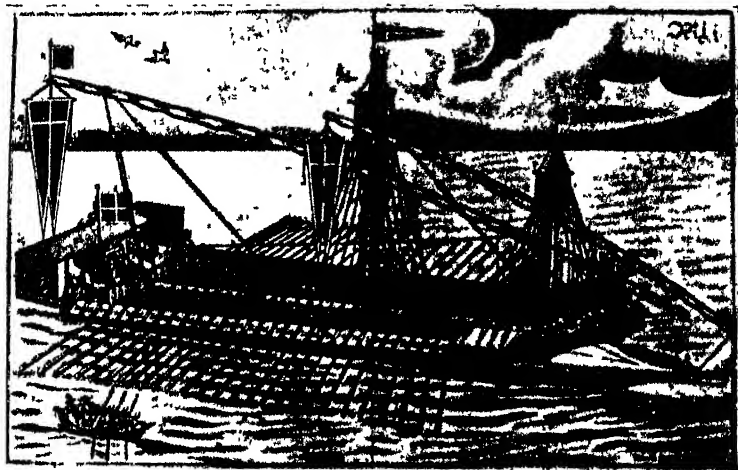
A MERCHANTMAN of the year 1519.

at the mercy of informers, and the English terror of a prosperous Ireland, that might prove again a source of power to the Crown against the English people, caused them to nip in the bud every Irish effort at industrial development. It was a fatal policy ; it drove Irish enterprise and Irish wool overseas to France, and the result of this proved more hurtful to English trade than anything that Ireland of herself could have done. The attempt to anglicize a subject race had failed, but it left the legacy of an English garrison, an object of hatred to the mass of the people.

The disaster of Ireland might have been repeated in the new world, but for the 3,000 miles of water that rolled between, the home colonial policy continued to be of the most selfish kind,

determined solely by the interests of the home trader. It took nearly two centuries to learn the real use and value of a colonial empire.

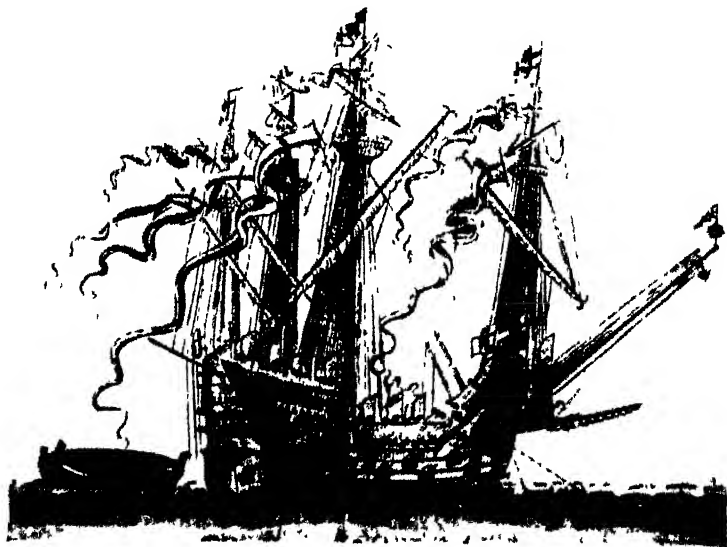
**The Mercantile Marine and the Navy.** Throughout the Middle Ages England had no navy. Ships were only used to transport troops, and when an Edward or a Henry wished to invade France he merely commandeered enough merchant ships for his



A GALLEY

purpose. These ships, indeed, were little suited to fighting. Since the days of the Phoenicians there had been two classes of vessels, the long ship and the round ship, for fighting and for trade. Even the Norseman had his long ship, but he was the only warrior who had dared in it the high seas. Mediaeval naval battles were fought in the inland waters of the Mediterranean in long narrow galleys, their length seven times their breadth, rowed by some fifty oars, decked almost flush with the water, whose main tactical weapon was the ram. They fought, in fact, a land battle on the sea. Their chief advantage was their mobility, their great drawback the very short time they could stay at sea. They were crowded with men and had little room for provisions or arms.

Such ships were totally unable to stand Atlantic weather. Again, for trade in the outer seas, the ordinary round ship, with length only twice its breadth, was too clumsy in manœuvring to defend itself against hordes of pirates. The Italians, for their northern trade, had developed an intermediate type between galley and round ship. Its length was three times its breadth ; it had less free-board than the ordinary merchant vessel, having

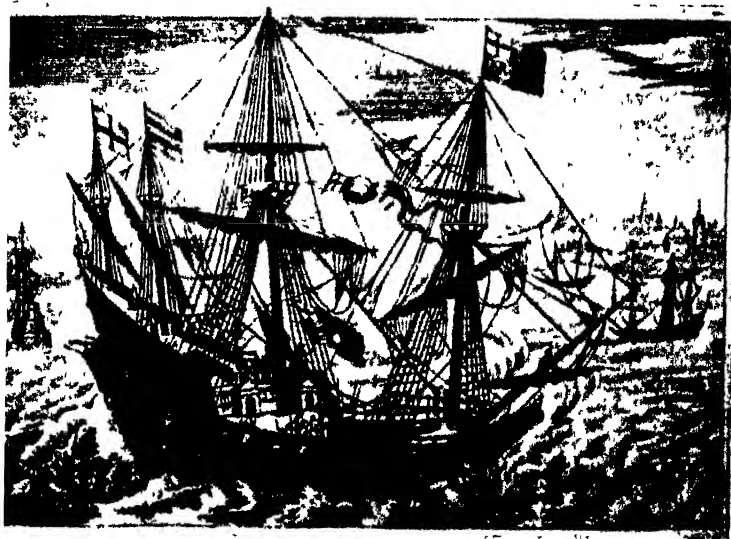


THE HENRY GRACE A DIEU

at first high erections fore and aft, later two complete decks. It started with auxiliary oars, but eventually trusted to sails alone. It was known as the merchant-galleasse, and carried all the Venetian trade with London and Antwerp. It was not used by the Spanish for their ocean trade till the seventeenth century. Henry VIII saw the possibilities of this type for war vessels. The first was the 'Great Galley', having both oars and sails, but the oars were soon dropped. If the year 1545 be considered the birth year of English naval power, the credit is due

Henry. By this date he had four classes of ships, great ships, carrackes, pinnaces (originally oared vessels, later small sailing ships, with length four times their width, used for scouting and messages), and finally row-barges, an invention of Henry's own.

The next fifty years was a time of experiment, and the controversies over oars versus sails, large versus small ships, were long and heated. The second point was not settled till after the



A GALLEON

defeat of the Armada, but before that date the conception of the warship as a gun platform was gaining acceptance. Gunnery was the forte of English seamen, and before the war with Spain broke out, England was recognized as the first naval power in the open seas. It was the vast resources of the Spanish monarch and the reputation of the Spanish infantry that England feared; there was no doubt as to her own superiority in seamanship and gunnery. In numbers and tonnage, too, the English navy that met it was little inferior to the great Armada, while its mobility

and trick of using its guns without boarding paralysed the Spanish tactics, based as they were on the grappling traditions of the galley.

The English naval ship that emerged from the struggle with Spain was a vessel of some 500 to 600 tons, with low freeboard, flush decks, and not very high tops. It could be handled quickly, could get alongside a large ship, pour a broadside below her waterline, and be off before the enemy could grapple. These smaller ships were not quite so roomy as the older type, but were more comfortable and owing to their lower tops rolled less.

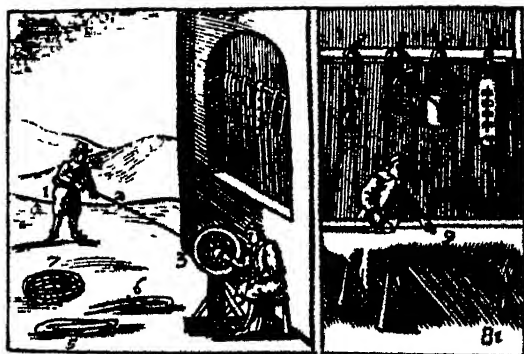
The pay of naval seamen was 6s. 8d. and later 10s. a month with kit, rations, and loot. Privateering paid better, and the naval service was not popular, especially as during the seventeenth century it was, for the most part, neglected and starved. Recruitment was by a sort of conscription among the seafaring population. There were no slaves however, galleys when used being rowed by freemen.

This sketch of the navy has been included for two reasons : (1) that a sea-trading power is always forced to protect its trade by some means, and the cost of doing so may really be regarded as a first charge on its commerce ; (2) because the growth of our navy is so intimately connected with that of the mercantile marine. Even in the twentieth century the English navy has drawn on the ships of commerce to an extent quite unforeseen ; in the sixteenth the distinction between the two was never very clear. When not wanted for war the queen's ships were used to earn their keep in commerce and the *Minion* and the *Jesus of Lubeck* were lent to Hawkins and others, while in the crisis of war every merchant-vessel was at the disposal of the Government. The war-galleon had developed out of the merchant-galleasse, and, whether its primary object was war or trade, every ship carried guns and used them.

**Variety and Extent of our Trade.** A sixteenth-century document,<sup>1</sup> that still exists, gives some idea of the multiplicity of articles in which a merchant of that day traded. It is the report

<sup>1</sup> *State Papers, Domestic, Eliz.*, vol. 255, no. 56, Record Office.

some leading merchant, probably of Bristol or Exeter, to State minister, perhaps Walsingham, on the trade with a number of foreign ports. The English exports include cloth, cottons, linen, ordnance, knives, scissors and shears, bell-metal, and small wares; foods such as wheat, butter, cheese, biscuit (for the Newfoundland fishermen), salt, pilchards (to sell then as now), beer and 'adulterated wines' (these last to Russia). Of minerals we exported lead and tin, and among other items wax, tallow, ropes, oak and looking-glasses. The exported goods were still more numerous. Of raw materials



ROPER AND CORDWAINER

we find iron, flax, hemp, tallow, wax, silk, saltpetre, fine skins, green wood, pitch, rosin and hops. Fruits such as oranges and lemons, raisins, currants, muscatels and dates, nuts and 'great onions twelve or thirteen inches about', with wines of all kinds are in the list. Timber, various oils, sugar, molasses, cochineal, ligo, sumach, lickerishe, log-wood, feathers, soap from Seville, spices and wares from the East Indies' appear, besides such unmanufactured things as cables, rope, linen, canvas, porcelains, carpets, cross-bows, sword-blades and articles in brass and copper. Such a list argues a very extensive trade and no small amount of luxury at home. The author's directions as to the necessity of only sending the finest cloths and linens to Spain and the

Levant throw light on the development that was taking place in English textiles. Still more illuminating are his warnings as to the precautions necessary to guard against both force and guile. Of Galicia he remarks, 'Here you must take heed that you gree with the customers for your customs, before you land your wares, for they will gree with you for two in the hundert. Otherwyse they will make you paye eight or ten in the hundert.' Of Nerve, Riga, and Revell, 'Here take hede you trust none of the countrye without payinge reddy moneye, for they are a very false people'; of the islands of Scotland and the north of Ireland, 'But you must take hede of the people, because they are false and full of trechery. Therefore you must keep good watch at night and be upon your own kepinge.' A gun-running trade with Barbary seems to have existed, 'but if the Spanyerdes take you trading with them, you dye for it'. From Bilbao to Bordeaux must have been a somewhat exciting trip, for 'From hence we convey all our moneys, both silver and gold, into France for the lading of our ships in Bordeaux, for the which we run great and dangerous adventures'. Indeed the Bay of Biscay seems to have offered more dangers than its storms provide, for of Rochelle he reports, 'And divers other kind of merchandise, for all the pirates of France do discharge here. You shall have many things of the Indies of Portingal better cheap than in Portingal, but you must take heed you go thither in a good ship or else you are like to be robbed by the way, either outwards or homewards.'

**Summary.** 1. In the race to take possession of the New World, either by commerce or by colonization, England started late. Spain and Portugal had in theory divided the earth between them, and in practice had occupied what seemed then the most desirable portions. From the middle of the sixteenth century England set out to challenge this monopoly, for the first fifty years in trade only, during the seventeenth century in colonization as well.

2. All English trade during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was in theory regulated and controlled, much of it was



actually so in practice. The regulated or the joint-stock company occupied most of the fields. The tendency to monopoly shown by both these forms of control brought out considerable opposition, but the object was freer access to the regulated company rather than general free trade. The great companies mostly survived into the eighteenth century, the East India into the middle of the nineteenth.

3. England began her colonial career in the seventeenth century, during which time the foundations of the United States, the English West Indies and British India were laid. Attempts to colonize Ireland failed.

4. The age of the Tudors saw the birth of the English Navy, and a revolution of the art of sea-warfare. Out of the old merchant ship was evolved a new type of warship, which replaced the war-galley of the Middle Ages, and English seamen first taught the world that sea-power depended on seamanship and gunnery. The connexion between the navy and the mercantile marine remained close, but from this time onwards there was always maintained a nucleus of state warships. The failure of the Spanish attempt to land an invading army had proved that England's safety lay in her wooden walls.

#### 4. Government Policies, 1500-1660

IN this chapter we shall gather together the various economic problems of the Tudor and Stuart governments and see how they tried to meet them.

**Enclosures.** The first of these with which the early Tudors were faced was the agrarian. We have seen how the new policy of the landlords of enclosing large areas for sheep-farming tended to depopulate the country and create unemployment. It was impossible for Tudor kings to ignore these disasters, even though they affected only the poor. There were several reasons for this :

(a) Such a disturbance of the customary stability of immemorial things produced violent unrest and constant disorders.

Tudor monarchs occupied a throne which had a considerable tendency to rock; claimants for the unstable position were many, and at any moment one of them might turn agrarian discontent into political adventure. The dispossessed were of the class that formed the backbone of English armies and were quite equal to the mercenaries that might be sent against them. Obviously it was best, if possible, to prevent the discontent.

(b) The shire levies were the source of England's man-power in time of war. The replacement of sturdy farmers and their sons by thousands of sheep threatened to make recruiting impossible. If the tradition of the English foot-soldier, won at Crécy, was to be maintained he must come from something better than the rogue and vagabond class. The maintenance, therefore, of a substantial peasantry was essential.

(c) Financially, too, the farming class was the backbone of the country. Subsidies and fifteenths were levied partly on the rent of land, partly on property and household goods. The disappearance of the substantial peasant farmer lessened the amount of taxable property, and, though the landlord might increase his rents and so pay more tax on them, the increase in tax so gained was not equal to the loss by the destruction of property. Especially was this so since the assessment of property was much nearer its real value than that of rents, many of the latter being returned at less than a tenth of their true amount.

For these reasons it was necessary for the government to take steps to prevent a too swift change in the system of land tenure and the administration of landed property. Let us now inquire what were the measures taken. First of all we find all through our period a series of statutes against enclosures and consequent depopulation. Except for a period of four years from 1549-53, when power was in the hands of the great landlords, who used it shamelessly in their own interests, the government saw that the law of the land should be against the unscrupulous innovator. All the statutes are very alike, all aim at maintaining a fixed portion of the land as arable. Typical clauses are :

(a) Pasture formerly under the plough to be re-converted ;

- (b) Destroyed farm buildings to be rebuilt ;
- (c) The number of sheep owned by one man to be limited to 2,000 ;
- (d) Fines to be imposed for converting tillage to pasture contrary to the Act ;
- (e) Cottages not to be built with less than four acres of land attached.

These statutes are evidence of good intention, but even in the twentieth century it is one thing to pass an Act of Parliament, another to get it carried out. The only machinery available for this consisted of the very powerful and extensive local government, which was controlled by the great magnates, and these were the very offenders to curb whom the Acts were passed. If something more effective than this could not be found, the Acts were likely to prove a dead letter. Consequently Commissions were appointed to investigate and enforce the statutes. Wolsey in 1517 started an active campaign of this kind, the same policy was continued by Thomas Cromwell, and throughout the rest of Henry VIII's reign we find the central government intervening to protect individual tenants from dispossession. Somerset went further and tried to put the clock back once for all by preventing all changes in the cultivation of an estate. He appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into offences against the anti-enclosure Acts, with power to pull down fences and restore decayed farms. Faced by the opposition of the great lords, the Commissioners failed, and Somerset's policy of pardoning rioters who took the law into their own hands soon brought about his downfall. His vacillation in dealing with the rebellion of Ket, who assembled 16,000 in a camp outside Norwich and assumed control of the district for five months, was due to his sympathy with rebels who were turning the tables on tyrannous landlords. Like most Tudor rebellions it was well organized, and the Protector would have done better had he definitely taken a side, either redressed grievances or, as Warwick eventually did, crushed the complainants by force.

The government of unscrupulous landlords, which succeeded

Somerset, set out to crush all resistance to the new order, and forbade by law meetings of the peasants for purposes of combined action. In the hands of interested justices this became a convenient weapon to prevent strikes and unions as well as riot and destruction of property

With the restoration of the power of the Crown the policy of preventing too tyrannous an application of change was con-



COTTAGES IN WEST HAGBOURNE, BERKSHIRE

inued. Other Commissions, with similar powers to that of Somerset, were appointed in 1607 and throughout the period 1630-36; they no doubt effected something, at least spasmodically. Later we shall consider the machinery of the Privy Council, which was the Tudor device for securing that local magnates did their duty. At its instance, with the help of the Courts of Equity, more protection than Common Law provided was given to the copyholder and tenant by lease. We cannot say that the government prevented the continuance of enclosures, it is not certain that it meant to, but it did act as a drag on the wheel

and so lessened the distress inevitable in swiftly changing conditions of life and labour.

**Corn Policy of the Government.** If the government took on itself to insist on men growing corn instead of sheep, it was reasonable to expect that it should also arrange that corn should pay a fair profit, and from 1534 onwards Acts appeared on the



TIMBER FRAMEWORK OF WATTLE-AND-DAUB BUILDING

statute book which aimed at ensuring a minimum price to the farmer. The principle common to them all was that, if the price of corn sank below a certain level, the surplus might be exported. The price fixed rose from 6s. 8d. in 1500 to 10s. in 1563 and 20s. in 1593 for a quarter of wheat. Such a plan aimed at preventing unnecessary increase of prices due to the export of food needed by the country, and at the same time prevented a plentiful harvest so lowering prices as to make corn-growing altogether a losing game. It has been claimed that this policy of 'pro-

tecting' the farmer was so successful that corn-growing became more profitable than sheep-rearing because of it, and so the enclosure question in its worst aspect solved itself. It is probable that security from loss did induce the farmer and landowner to keep more land in tillage, but as a matter of fact the prices fixed were so low that only in ten years between 1514 and 1600 did the market sink below them. Consequently the protection of the farmer was practically not needed. That the farmer would have liked much greater protection is certain, but there were two elements in the nation more important in Tudor eyes than the farmer: the first was the ever-growing population of London, clamouring to be fed; the second, the very poor, who, if food was too dear, would provoke riot and disorder. For both these low prices were desirable, hence the exportation of grain was strictly controlled. It did, however, take place under licences, of which there were more perhaps than was desirable, but they were a source of considerable revenue to the Crown. There was one strict prohibition, the export of corn to enemy countries. Elizabeth and her advisers thoroughly understood that economic weapons were as useful as steel and powder, and though Spain had much silver and gold it was deficient in natural and industrial products. So while Drake seized Spanish galleons and Elizabeth herself detained weatherbound treasure ships, she also saw to it that supplies of raw material should not go from England to her enemies.

The internal trade in corn was closely watched and controlled by the government. The 'Book of Orders' contains regulations more minute than even the Great European War could force on us in the twentieth century. In every district men had to report the exact quantities of corn they held, to put a certain amount on the market first for the benefit of the poor before the 'corn bodgers' or middlemen might buy large quantities. Only the surplus might be sent out of the district, though special licences for transfer were made in the interest of London. Through the Clerks of the Markets, who were royal officials, not local dignitaries, the central government kept itself well informed,

and licences of all kinds were issued with a view to equalizing the price all over the country. Drastic interference was constant. Malting was often prohibited, especially of barley, and grain fit for human food was not allowed to be fed to dogs or pigs. It was all most paternal, and no doubt did something to ease the distress of the very poor, but its success depended on securing honest officials, very rarely to be found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Maintained by the strong hand of Elizabeth's government, it sank into disuse under the incompetence of the Stuarts.

**Government Control of Industry.** The development of industry from an affair of the towns to an affair of nations was naturally followed by an attempt at national instead of municipal regulation. Nothing was further from any one's idea than that it should be left to the uncontrolled forces of competition. Quite early in the century the state began to recognize that industry was rapidly outgrowing the capacity of local control. The sanction of gild ordinances had already passed out of the hands of the mayor to those of the Justices of the Peace, in 1503 it was transferred to the Lord Chancellor and the Justices of Assize. Districts were no longer self-contained, they were dependent on each other, and regulation must proceed from some power outside them all. Having assumed control, the central government had to decide between conflicting interests. Should it help the old corporate towns to prevent the spread of manufacture to the country districts, or leave the enterprising capitalist to exploit the peasant and crush out the gild members by the use of cheap unorganized labour? Should it, again, stand by the wealthy capitalist and, on mercantile principles, seek national wealth and power at the expense of the poorer citizens, or should it throw its weight on the side of the weak and support the labourer and the craftsman against his overbearing master?

The first of these questions it answered by a consistent support of the corporate town and the regularized gild against the free-lance capitalist and his cheap country labour. In 1523 an Act was passed compelling worsteds manufactured in the country

round Norwich to be finished and dyed within the town. In 1555 the Weaver's Act limited the country weaver to one loom and to two apprentices, and forbade any one to set up as a clothier except in a town or a place where there was already a cloth manufacture of ten years' standing. As in agriculture, so in industry, Tudor sovereigns acted as brakes on a too rapid development of competitive capitalism.

The answer of the central government to the second question is not so easily determined. In so far as a contented working class was necessary to that ideal of peace and order, which was so clearly before Tudor monarchs, in so far, but no farther, the government tried to protect the weaker members of the nation. But it was very definitely with the idea of keeping things as they were, with prevention of the grosser abuses. Any attempt to raise the standard of living of the class as a whole was effectively prevented, by still leaving the employing class in control. Justices of the peace and mayors and aldermen who fixed wages and prices were unlikely to be unduly generous, and to prevent them being over-tyrannous was there not the long arm of the Privy Council?

Elizabethan industrial legislation is best seen in the STATUTE OF ARTIFICERS or of APPRENTICES, passed in 1563. Its principal clauses were :

(a) All able-bodied men were liable to serve as agricultural labourers, unless exempted as belonging to special trades or classes.

(b) All hirings were to be for the year. No casual day labour.

(c) In passing from one employer to another, a certificate of release was necessary from the first.

(d) In all industries and trades there should be seven years apprenticeship.

(e) Clothiers residing outside the corporate towns could not take as apprentices the sons of even 40s. freeholders, but only of those who held a 60s. freehold.

(f) Wages were to be fixed by the Justices of the Peace, under the supervision of the Privy Council.



It is not easy for us, living in the twentieth century, to judge accurately either the fairness or the wisdom of such an enactment. At first glance one is tempted to call it industrial conscription, if not by law, then by birth. The atmosphere seems entirely that of

‘God bless the squire and his relations  
And keep us in our proper stations.’

Once an agricultural labourer, always an agricultural labourer ; no freedom of movement, consequently little power to bargain



A DYER

as to conditions of work ; wages fixed by justices of the employer class and men bound by statute law to accept or starve, some towns indeed going further and forbidding even the liberty to starve, by imprisoning those who refused to work for the statutory wage ; the trades in which money might be made closed to the poor man's son by a lengthy apprenticeship, and even a class qualification for entry ; things like this seem class legislation of the direst kind, and we remember that Tudor power rested largely on the support of the corporate towns and the *nouveaux riches*. Such an interpretation of the statute

would, however, be very unfair. To get the other point of view let us consider what would have happened had Adam Smith lived two centuries earlier than he did and the statesmen of the age believed that their duty was to leave economic forces to work freely. In that case the lot of the wage-earner would have been much worse. With the worker exposed to the full blast of unlimited competition, all political and municipal power being in the hands of the employer and with no Privy Council to restrain its full exercise, wages would have gone down far below the level of decent subsistence, wealth would have piled on wealth in the hands of the few, all consideration for the welfare of the whole nation, as distinct from the money-making class would have ceased. It is true that the statesmen of the time had no belief in the equal rights of men, but who then had? Society was, by the ordinance of God and Nature, arranged in horizontal strata, and it was most undesirable that these should be disturbed on any large scale. A favoured few might pass from one to the other, but for the majority it was best that they should do their duty in that state of life to which it *had pleased* God to call them. Admitting this outlook and remembering that the world has as yet adopted no other, we shall be more willing to appreciate the really good intentions of the authors of the Act. Stability and contentment was their object; the worker should have a reasonable income with security for its continuance; if not born too low in the social scale he should be thoroughly trained for his work and free, by force of brains and character, to win for himself a place among the advisers of kings. Such a man was Sir Lionel Cranfield, sometime mercer's apprentice, later the rival of Bacon and agent of his downfall. As long as proper consideration was paid to the claims of the master, every effort was made to secure that service should be adequately paid and not exploited. Everything of course depended on the strength, honesty and wisdom of the central control; how far that could be effective we shall shortly see.

The Stuarts continued the industrial policy of Elizabeth, but they lacked her talent for finding a middle path and, since they

were as extravagant as she was parsimonious, their measures were soon complicated and their benevolence vitiated by fiscal considerations. Both James and Charles held very high views of the duty they owed their subjects; they aimed at creating a prosperous and happy people on the condition that all such happiness and prosperity must flow from a royal source. Such an aim demands little short of omniscience in any age, in one so rapidly advancing as the seventeenth century it could only be the dream of a child or a fool. Still it was attempted. There were two methods available, to create regulated companies or to employ royal officials. The Stuarts naturally preferred the latter, and though they encouraged the incorporation of the less wealthy companies we find too often that these soon lapsed into mere tools by which some court monopolist manipulated the trade to his own advantage. The monarchs themselves, however good their intentions, unfortunately lacked the one essential power of choosing wisely their advisers or delegates, and the corruption of Stuart officials, the unblushing and open use of what the American calls 'graft', was universal. When to incompetence and dishonesty was added an obstinate determination to find some means of raising money without the control of Parliament, there was all the material at hand for wild interference in industry and the pursuit of mad or disastrous schemes.

The story of the failure of the scheme of Alderman Cockayne illustrates most of these points. The king's chief dispute with his parliament was his claim to lay imposts on merchandise at his pleasure. It was not easy to defend his claim on grounds of right, and it occurred to the king's advisers that a better basis could be found in the connexion between customs and national rivalry. If other nations excluded our goods or put up tariffs against them it was necessary, they argued, that there should be prompt action on the part of our government, and it was suggested that only the king could act with sufficient speed, and that parliamentary delays prevented us from retaliating on other aggressive commercial nations. It was also desirable to prevent our imports exceeding our exports, whereby gold passed

over the seas and left us dangerously handicapped in case of war. With these ostensible reasons, and behind them the real one of securing a revenue for the Crown that should be outside the control of Parliament, Cockayne's scheme was embarked on in 1615. In return for a monopoly of the export of finished cloth, a substantial income was promised to the king. To secure sufficient material the export of unfinished cloth was forbidden. As the bulk of the cloth export trade was still this unfinished material, the Merchant Adventurers declared they could not carry on and their privileges were promptly transferred to Cockayne and his fellows. But England had no monopoly of mercantilist ideas or powers of retaliation. To our attempt to force on the Dutch markets finished cloth which they did not want and refusal to supply white cloth which they did, the Hollanders replied by excluding all cloth from England, finished or unfinished. James retorted by forbidding export of wool even from Scotland and Ireland, where the trade was considerable. Smuggling was the inevitable result. Attempts to force Dutch ships calling at our ports to take with them cargoes of finished cloth failed likewise. By 1616 there was much unemployment in the weaving trade, and the Dutch were setting out to do their own weaving; there were plans to force merchants to buy cloth they could not sell, and in 1617 the whole scheme was dropped. Had these protectionist methods succeeded as they did in France, the absolute position of the monarch would have been assured, monopolies would have flourished, and there is little reason to suppose a paternal but impecunious government could have prevented further exploitation of the workers.

**The Machinery of Government.** Constant reference has been made in the preceding paragraphs to the minute care taken by the central government to regulate industry; the question arises, 'How did they manage it?' It is not perhaps so difficult for us to understand their method now as it was a few years ago. We must get rid of our nineteenth-century ideas of the supremacy of Parliament and realize that the Tudor monarch had at least as much power as his parliaments, and that the Stuarts asserted

a right to a great deal more. The King in Council issued proclamations at pleasure and, provided these did not invent new crimes or impose new taxes, they passed unchallenged. It is to the PRIVY COUNCIL we must look to find the power that enforced the remarkable interference with social rather than political matters. It consisted, in 1553, of forty members of whom only eighteen were peers, the rest commoners, and all were servants of the king. A wise monarch consulted and used them, the unwise overrode them with temporary impunity. Such a body, determined to see peace and order in every corner of the realm, working in an age when the royal power was only vaguely defined and when a popular monarch acting in concert with such a band of devoted adherents could stretch it considerably, was able to effect much. Its instruments were two. To the Justices of the Peace was given the power to order and control locally. It was they who fixed wages and prices; they who controlled, in this case in conjunction with special commissioners, the corn trade; they who were responsible for the relief of the poor and the proper performance of their duties by constable and overseer. Usually nominees of the Crown, though some boroughs had the right to elect their own justices, they were very definitely the servants of the Council. They made monthly reports of all that occurred in their district, they wrote to ask advice, and were sharply pulled up if they indulged in any irregularity.

So much for the administration, but how were the decrees enforced and powerful and recalcitrant magnates compelled? For this purpose two penal instruments were at hand, the COURTS of the STAR CHAMBER and of REQUESTS. Actually they were Committees of the Privy Council, and their legality as Law Courts was doubtful, but for a long time they were extremely popular with all except the wealthy and powerful. Tenants oppressed by the 'custom of the manor', townsmen fighting the narrow oligarchy that sought only its own interests appealed to the Court of Requests with a fair chance of success, which would never have been theirs in the Courts of Common Law. For

these new courts offered more than law, they sought to grant justice, and in its name would override a legal decision. Obviously there was in them plenty of room for oppression, and when such courts dealt with religious matters or the king's revenues they became mere high-handed imposers of the king's will. They are seen at their best when dealing with land and industry, and in this case fulfilled admirably the purpose for which they were created, the protection of the weak.

Obviously the machinery described above depended absolutely for success on its motive power. Under Elizabeth and for a time under Charles I the Privy Council worked with admirable thoroughness, justices were instructed, exhorted, and sharply reprimanded as occasion required. But the moment the Council weakened or had its attention distracted by political or fiscal problems, the whole machine stopped, and since the weak had been only protected and not made strong, abuses were even worse than before.

**The Poor Law.** The effect of the changes of the sixteenth century in producing a crowd of unemployed and vagrants has already been explained, it remains to see how the government faced the difficulty. In the early part of the century the causes behind the alarming phenomenon of bands of sturdy vagrants, ready to steal, bully and trick at any moment, as well as the increasing stream of helpless starving misery, were not understood. That it was not their individual fault, that under the shifting conditions of the time work was not always obtainable, was so new an idea that it simply did not occur. Consequently we find the early efforts for dealing with the problem marked by a brutality that was only modified after fifty years of proved failure.

There are three periods to consider :

(a) Municipal attempts to deal with the increasing numbers of semi-destitute within the towns. This lasts till about 1569.

(b) From 1569-97 experimental efforts by Parliament to deal with the problem on national lines.

(c) The great Acts of 1597 and 1601 and their administration by the Privy Council.

The Municipal experiments were various. We must remember that the relief of the poor was still regarded as a charitable duty on the part of individuals, not as a function of the city or state as a whole. Anything like compulsory contribution was quite impossible at first. Another point to be noted is that the sixteenth-century authorities, in this case wiser than those of the nineteenth, believed that prevention was better than cure, and did not wait for a family to be destitute before providing help. Indeed, much



THE PRIORY CLOISTERS, CHRIST'S HOSPITAL

of the regulation turns on what we should call emergency help, such as cheap corn in time of scarcity, loans to replace loss by fire or flood, the apprenticing of children of poor parents, and so on. The following typical efforts are recorded of London and some other towns. Corn was stored, and thrown on the market in times of high prices. Beggars were forbidden to ask charity without a licence, and in 1524 in London a search was made for able-bodied idlers, who were whipped. In 1547 the London Common Council levied a compulsory tax for relief of the poor. At the instigation of Bishop Latimer in 1552 a compre-

hensive scheme for London was adopted. St Thomas's and St. Bartholomew's Hospitals were to relieve the sick and impotent, Christ's Hospital was founded for fatherless children, and in 1557 the palace of Bridewell was turned over to the City as a place where sturdy vagabonds were put to work and poor children taught a craft. The organization of Bridewell was not so much like a gaol as is the modern workhouse. The inmates were paid for their work and from this wage paid for their board and lodging. They worked at all kinds of handicraft, the material



A BEGGAR

being supplied by the city members of the trade, who paid for the labour. The goods so made, therefore, did not compete on the open market with the product of ordinary labour, and so bring down the general price. Finally, Bethlehem Hospital took charge of the insane.

All these schemes were only partially successful. There was a difficulty in raising funds. People objected to compulsory taxa-

tion for the purpose. Worse than this, however, London and other towns, such as Norwich, which took the matter seriously in hand, became the Mecca of all the destitute of the countryside. Obviously if the thing was to be done at all it must be done everywhere.

During the early period the government had not been altogether idle. In 1528 Wolsey ordered the clothiers to go on manufacturing, even though the action of the government had closed the Flemish markets, but the result was a speedy modification of our foreign policy. In 1527, during a time of scarcity, a Commission was appointed to prevent engrossing of corn, and at other times prices were regulated. In 1531 Parliament



ordered the licensing of the impotent poor to beg, sturdy beggars to be put in the stocks or whipped, and sent to their native place. In 1536 beggars returned to their native place were kept at the public expense, and, if able, made to work. Alms were to be collected every Sunday. In 1547 slavery was made the penalty for begging, but in 1549 this order was repealed and whipping restored. In 1551 alms were ordered to be collected by the mayor or by the parson and churchwarden, with all possible persuasion. In 1563 compulsion was in sight, for the magistrates were ordered to assess a recalcitrant giver.

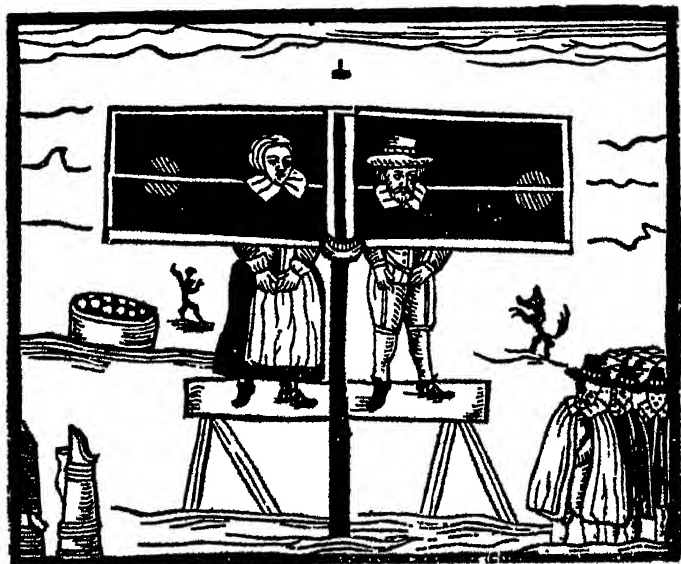
The second period saw the attempt of Parliament to deal with the matter for the whole nation. Its Acts were largely experimental, and repressive rather than preventive. That of 1572 was very severe. It included even the workman on strike for

higher wages, as also the unlicensed strolling player. For the first offence a vagabond was liable to be whipped and bored through the ear, for the second adjudged a felon, and for the third the penalty was death. In spite of its severity the Act was at certain times rigorously enforced. In the Middlesex sessions of 1572-5, 44 vagabonds were sentenced to be branded, 5 to be hanged, and 8 set to service. "Such a case as that of Joan Wynstone, who was whipped and branded on February 6, on July 26 saved from hanging by being set to service to her husband,



A BEGGAR

and having run away was caught on October 3 and thereupon hanged, makes one wonder what domestic tragedy lies hidden behind the ghastly record. The same Act threw the burden of the impotent poor on the district and authorized compulsory contributions from all. In 1576 an Act ordered Houses of Correction, like Bridewell, to be erected in every county. In 1589 attempts to deal with the housing question were made.



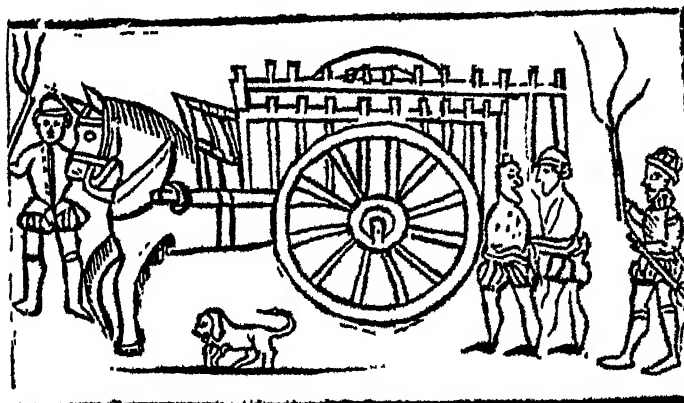
TWO PRETENDED FORTUNE-TELLERS IN THE PILLORY

Only one family was to live in one house, no new houses were to be built in London or Westminster except for well-to-do folk, and in the country no cottages were to be built with less than four acres of land attached. No suggestion was made as to where the displaced slum dwellers were to go, or to compel landowners to build cottages at all, so needless to say the problem was not solved.

The third period opens with the great Act of 1597, which was completed and confirmed in 1601. This was really a compre-

hensive code dealing with the whole question and was based on the experience gained during the past century. This Act FOR THE RELIEF OF THE POOR placed the control in the hands of the Churchwardens of the parish and four overseers. It ordered :

- (a) Poor children to be set to work or apprenticed ,
- (b) Material to be provided for the adult unemployed to work on ;
- (c) Hospitals for the impotent to be built on waste land ;



WHIPPING VAGABONDS AT THE CART'S TAIL.

- (d) Funds to be levied on the district, by distress if necessary ;
- (e) All beggars, except those begging in their own parish, to be classed as rogues.

THE ACT FOR THE PUNISHMENT OF ROGUES, &c., repealed former statutes and authorized the building of Houses of Correction. Rogues were to be whipped and sent to the House of Correction at the place of their birth and thence set to service.

With regard to these Acts, it is well to note a distinction was made between those who could not and those who would not work ; that the ' right to work ' was recognized and the burden of finding it thrown on the district officials. It must also be added that the Houses of Correction were, up to the time of

the Civil War, better in many ways than modern workhouses. Since they provided work for willing workers as well as for professed rogues, they had less of the prison about them. The dietary of the House at Bury compares favourably with modern practice. Unfortunately the finding of work for those who were willing was the first part of the legislation to lapse, and in 1609 it seems no longer to have been compulsory.

The administration of this great Code of Laws for the relief of the poor depended finally on the Privy Council. The overseers



A MINSTREL IN THE STOCKS

were under the supervision of the Justices of the Peace, and to learn what they could be like, if not kept up to their duties, we may turn to the plays of Shakespeare. On the constables depended the arrest of the sturdy rogue, and too many of them were of Dogberry's way of thinking :—

'How if a' will not stand?'

*Dogberry.* 'Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go; and presently call the rest of the watch together and thank God you are rid of a knave.'

Before we blame too much such easy-going ways, we should remember that the constable held an unpaid office forced often

on a reluctant citizen and that the vagabond of Elizabeth's day was as tough a customer as ever a posse of London police are called upon to deal with. For high-handed insolence he could only probably be matched nowadays in the wilder parts of America and Australia, and since the punishment for violence was, in the case of a confirmed rogue, the same as for wandering, viz. hanging, he had little to deter him from resistance if caught. At periods when the Privy Council was strong and vigilant,



A PEDLAR

e. g. 1629-41, the law was probably well administered and all parties kept to their duties. Such a Council was strong enough, if it were honest enough, to be no respecter of persons, and we do actually find it interfering to relieve the poor and to prevent sweating. In 1637 it sent Sir Thomas Reynolds to the Fleet for trying to force his workmen to accept goods instead of wages, and kept him there till he had paid his men double what they had lost.

The chief difficulty in getting the law administered was the anxiety of every district to keep down its rates by passing on the burden to another neighbourhood. Endless disputes as to

the question of 'settlement' arose. The parish where a man was born was supposed to keep him, but in days of no birth registration this was not always easy to determine, and indeed in this twentieth century the Settlement Law is so complicated as to be a source of trouble to most of those concerned. Besides this, poor people often suffered by being turned out of the place in which they had lived for years, for fear they might come on the rates, many who, left alone, might have kept themselves afloat being thus turned to vagabondage.

A few other devices for the relief of the poor may be noted :—

1. The billeting of children on richer folk.
2. Temporary assistance to poor people who were not destitute, e. g. fuel in winter, free medical help, or assistance in time of plague.
3. Compulsion on corn dealers to sell part of their supplies to the poor at less than the market rate.
4. Prevention of malting and the export of beer in times of scarcity.
5. Founding of almshouses and hospitals, both by private charity and from the County rates.
6. Granting of pensions to soldiers and sailors and to the aged poor. To the latter the rate was usually 1s. a week, with sometimes a cottage on the waste added.
7. The sending of children too young to be apprenticed to 'a knittinge schooldame'; they were also boarded out.
8. 'Emigration' for vagrants--in other words transportation as slaves for a period to Virginia and Barbadoes. At the end of their period they were given land.
9. Loans to young tradesmen and artificers to set up in business.
10. The supply of work to willing workers, often in their own houses instead of at the House of Correction.

All these measures combined seem to have been successful, for by 1640 the really alarming army of sturdy rogues and cheats had ceased to be a danger, and desperate poverty at least had largely disappeared. How far the impotent and aged escaped from misery and suffering is more difficult to say.

**Revenue.** The connexion between the Crown's revenue and industrial legislation has been pointed out already, it may be well to see in what way the sources of and methods of raising money for national expenditure had changed.

(a) First of all, the customary dues on imports and exports remained. Tonnage and poundage, with subsidies on wool, skins, and leather were, until 1625, the king's for life. The revenue from this source was, however, considerably lessened by the methods of collection, which allowed fraud on a large scale, as much as three-quarters being, in the opinion of the Venetian ambassador in 1557, lost by peculation and smuggling and expenses of collection. It was often farmed, and in 1590 the farmer, Sir Thomas Smith, was made to disgorge some of his ill-gotten gains, and the revenue from this source rose from £24,000 to £50,000. In 1613 it was under £150,000, and the appointment of Cranfield in 1615, on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief, raised it to £190,000 in two more years; by the accession of Charles I it had reached £323,000.

(b) Grants of fifteenths and tenths were continued at intervals, the last being in 1623. They yielded about £30,000.

(c) But expenses were increasing, the value of money declining, and more taxes became necessary. These took the form of 'subsidies'. A full subsidy was supposed to be 4s. in the £ on the yearly value of freehold land and 2s. 8d. in the £ on all movables, including crops. The apparel of a man, his wife, and his children was free from tax; those who had less than £3 worth of goods were exempt; aliens paid double. Many attempts were made to get a real assessment, but were successfully resisted. No man paid on both land and goods, and landowners managed to throw most of the burden on those who paid on movables. Landowners of Gloucestershire, mostly retired Bristol merchants who seem to have anticipated the methods of latter-day Chicago traders, were assessed on their lands for such absurd sums as £30 and £40. Justices of the Peace, whose statutory qualification for their position was £20, would assess themselves at £6 and £10, when their actual income was at

least £100. In 1522 the citizens of London successfully resisted an attempt to force them to make their returns on oath! By the end of the sixteenth century a subsidy became a sum of about £80,000 distributed over the country 'as before'.

(d) In the course of the Reformation certain revenues originally belonging to the Church passed to the king. Such were first-fruits and tenths of ecclesiastical benefices, transferred in 1534. As they were made on the assessment of 1291, they did not represent one-fifth of the real value.

(e) In 1641 a poll-tax was levied and produced £400,000 in sums ranging from £100 to 6*d.*

(f) Lastly, there were the feudal revenues, such as fines for knighthoods, wardships, and so on. These were rigorously demanded during the twelve years that Charles ruled without a parliament.

Besides the above were the monopolies already described, and Charles's ship-writs. The latter are sufficiently dealt with in political histories.

**Coinage.** A word must be said as to the state of the coinage. It will be remembered that both Henry VIII and the government of Edward VI had debased it so that the value of a shilling had sunk to 2½*d.* Among the first cares of Elizabeth was its re-establishment. It was a large undertaking and managed with considerable skill by Thomas Gresham. The first step was to stamp the debased coins with a mark which should show something nearer their real value. The silver testoon, whose nominal value was 6*d.*, was marked to 4½*d.* and the worst specimens to 2½*d.* Then a date was set by which they would be exchanged for good silver coins. Similar dealings were arranged with regard to other coins, and within a year, at Michaelmas 1561, the whole transaction was complete. The government undertook the cost of recoinage, the loss on the individual coins fell on their possessors, and as a net result the government made a profit on the business. On the other hand, the trade of the country was set at last on a safe basis of a proper exchange commodity.

**Summary.** 1. The government dealt with the agrarian



difficulties of the time by a series of Acts to prevent excessive enclosure for the purpose of sheep-farming. The administration of these Acts was enforced spasmodically by commissioners and, though they did not prevent all enclosure, they certainly tended to act as a drag on too swift a change.

2. The corn policy of the government depended on three factors: the desirability of inducing farmers to grow corn instead of sheep, the necessities of the towns especially of London,



ARTISANS AT WORK COINING

and the importance of preventing distress among the poorest of the people. Of these the two last outweighed the first and exportation of corn was strictly controlled, as were the doings of corn-bodgers and other middlemen. At the same time the farmers had to get a guarantee of a minimum price, though a low one.

3. During this 150 years the control of industry passed entirely to the central government. The policy of Elizabeth was wholly in favour of the corporate towns and the regulated companies, and there was much legislation to prevent the growth of manufactures in new districts. Within the industries the government aimed at stability and order, passing laws to prevent a man

changing his trade easily, to secure a sufficiency of agricultural labour by enforcing it on the majority of those born in rural districts, enforcing a universal seven years' apprenticeship, and preventing casual employment. Wages were fixed by the Justices of the Peace.

The Stuarts continued the policy of minute central regulation, but were driven by their financial needs to the creation of close corporations and monopolies, which alienated eventually most of the trading and industrial classes.

4. The Tudor and Stuart instrument of government was not Parliament, but the Privy Council. This powerful body had its eye and hand in every corner of the realm and controlled the minutest details. Its instruments to secure its power were the Courts of the Star Chamber and of Requests, both powerful enough to deal with the haughtiest offender.

5. After a century of experiment, a series of Acts for the Relief of the Poor and the Suppression of Rogues was passed in 1597 and remained the basis of our Poor Law till 1833. It aimed at succouring the sick, aged, and impotent, at training the fatherless child, providing work for those unemployed who were willing to work, and forcing to work the wilfully idle, the rogue, and the vagabond. The units of administration were the parish and the county, and the officers were under the control of the Privy Council. It reached its greatest efficiency under the absolute government of Charles I.

6. The revenue of the Crown consisted of the established customs, grants of fifteenths and tenths, the feudal revenues and the proceeds of patents and monopolies. These were supplemented by grants of subsidies consisting of an income-tax on land and a capital levy on goods. The revenue tended to be inadequate, partly owing to faulty methods of collection, but also to increasing prices together with additional claims on the central administration. Although the old idea that 'the king shall live of his own' was gone, Englishmen still resented taxation and were grudging suppliers of the royal needs. The extravagance of the Stuarts brought matters to a crisis.

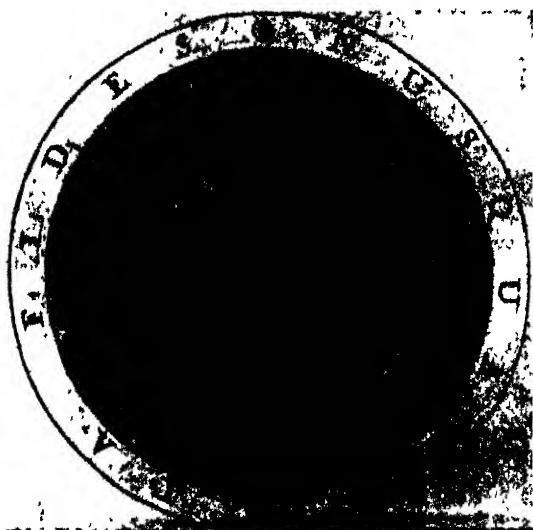
## PART V. 1660-1750

### I. Rural England from the Restoration to the Eve of the Great Enclosures

THIS period of a hundred years was transitional in the history of rural England. During it there were no startling changes, no rapid deterioration of one class or another. It is only by looking back at the end of it that the beginnings are seen of those ruinous currents that were to end in the Niagara that swept away the English peasant.

During the sixteenth century the condition of the small peasant had changed rapidly for the worse, with the inevitable accompaniment of social misery and dislocation. By the second decade of the seventeenth century the process of deterioration had slowed down; the peasant holder did not recover his lost ground, but his condition did not greatly worsen. The same statement is true for the period we are now dealing with. There was much talk of improved methods of agriculture, but little actual improvement made. Enclosures proceeded slowly, the ingrained inertia of rural England survived the upheaval of the sixteenth century and blocked the way to any rapid change. There was a tendency to consolidate holdings into farms of 300 to 400 acres, which were more profitable and capable of more productive agriculture, and, in spite of the assertions of their advocates, this movement did drive the small peasant holder from the soil. But the number of enclosures previous to 1760 was comparatively small; there were some 250 Acts of Parliament during the first half of the eighteenth century and a certain number of enclosures by mutual consent, resulting altogether in less than 350,000 acres being enclosed. At the same time several farms tended to conglomerate into one man's hands, and this created a class of wealthy tenant-farmers, employing wage-

earning labourers instead of small holders, living largely on the produce of their land. At the same time the large farmers and landowners greedily absorbed the commons as opportunity offered, and without his common rights it was very difficult for the small freeholder or cottager to live. But the process was slow; the bulk of the nation was still dependent on the work of its own hands in its own fields, and it was not till after 1750

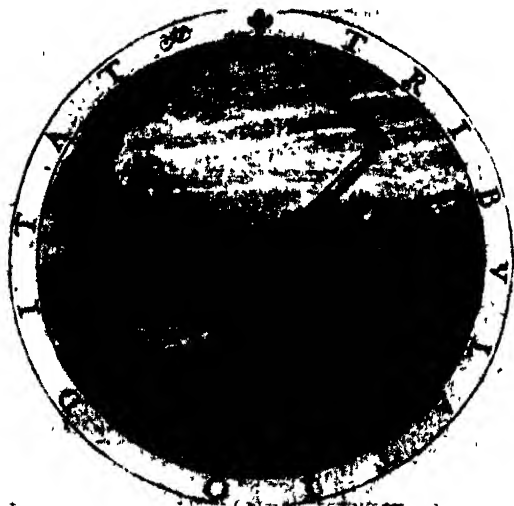


A CROSS-CUT SAW

that the process of driving the rural worker from his home began seriously. In 1696 Gregory King estimated that there were in England 160,000 freeholders and 150,000 farmers with incomes averaging £50, as against 50,000 shopkeepers and 60,000 artisans with incomes of £45 and £38 average respectively. He reckoned that more than half the population were above the wage-earning class.

**Increased power of the class of large landholders.** The most striking change of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth

centuries was the return to power of the landowner. We have seen that Tudor power was based on the new aristocracy of successful business men, the 'Commonwealth' had been made by the smaller trader and merchant, but with the Restoration came reaction. The Cavalier parliaments were dominated by the country party and the well-being of their own class was their chief concern. The power of the Crown was breaking,



A FLAIL

Parliament ruled the government because it had at last secured real control of the nation's purse, and the House of Commons ruled Parliament. The Revolution did not greatly alter matters; the Whig policy was to encourage industry, and agriculture was the greatest of English industries. For 150 years the large landowner retained his power and used it shamelessly in his own interest.

His first step was to make himself absolute owner of the land he held. He had long been such *de facto*, he now proceeded to legitimize his position. The feudal baron had been a *tenant*,

and even in 1660 land held by military tenure was, nominally at least, the king's. The copyholder had long since freed himself from personal service and held his land by a money rent, the tenant-in-chief still paid his feudal dues of wardship, marriage, fines, &c. These dues had long seemed a grievous burden, and even in James I's time there had been a move to get rid of them; the Restoration parliament of landowners was determined to see the last of them. The obvious substitute for them in the Crown revenue was a land tax on the land held by military service, but the ingenious holders of power saw a chance of repudiating their own liabilities and throwing them on the nation at large. They substituted for the king's feudal revenues certain Customs and Excise,<sup>1</sup> and while retaining their own copyhold rents, unblushingly transferred the rent of their own much larger estates to the people at large. Once every man in England paid, either in money rent or service, for the land he claimed the right to use; since 1660 it has been the absolute property of a favoured few.

Their next procedure was to gain government protection for agriculture and the maintenance of prices, and the Act of Settlement helped to secure them a supply of labour at prices fixed by themselves. There was nothing to restrain them; the Crown, which in Tudor times had been a serious drag on their acquisitiveness, was powerless; the Church, which in the Middle Ages had offered a way of escape to the ambitious and an unreasoning but seasonable charity to the unfortunate, had sunk to be a mere appanage of the landed class, its wealthier members one more set of parasites on the land, its poorer priests servants and hangers-on of the lord. At no time in our history was the prestige of both Church and Crown at so low an ebb as during the first half of the eighteenth century.

The advantageous position acquired by the landowner is well seen in figures given by Arthur Young, who wrote full and descriptive accounts of certain journeys he took during the latter part of the eighteenth century. In 1770 rent was about

<sup>1</sup> See p. 302.

ros. an acre, which was 20 times that of the fifteenth century, the price of wheat was  $6\frac{1}{2}$  times, that of labour  $3\frac{1}{2}$  times what it had been three centuries before. Obviously it was the great landlord who benefited most by the change, and his improved position had been won mainly at the cost of the agricultural labourer.

**Condition of the agricultural population.** During the first part of the period the condition of the rural villager was bad; after 1700 it improved somewhat, being better than at any time since the fifteenth century. In 1662 the position of those on the border line of extreme poverty had been made worse by an Act passed solely in the interest of the employer and the ratepayer. This was the notorious ACT OF SETTLEMENT. Its purpose was to prevent vagabonds and vagrants exploiting those parishes which carried out their duties under the Poor Law properly, by settling there and so relieving of the burden the districts that refused to make adequate provision. There no doubt was an abuse of this kind, and we may at least give the originators of the Act credit for blindness in their action. For the Act empowered overseers to secure an order from the Justices of the Peace to remove from their parish any new-comer who occupied a tenement of annual value less than £10, unless he could give security that he would not become chargeable to the parish. He might stay, however, during harvest time. The authors of the Act probably did not foresee the terrible effect of chaining the unemployed to a district where no work could be had, but when they did discover this unforeseen effect, they legislated, not to free the labourer, but to allow him to move under licence only, with suitable guarantees from his parish that he could be sent back if he sank to a condition of needing poor relief. This was in 1697. The Revolution that freed the upper and middle classes from the tyranny of the Crown had no freedom for the unrepresented class, of which the Crown had in the past not infrequently been the protector. It was no thanks to Parliament that the condition of the rural worker did not deteriorate more rapidly.

### Classes of Society found in an Eighteenth-century Village.

1. YEOMEN OR FREEHOLDERS. These may be divided into three grades: (a) many in the south and midlands with incomes equal to those of the gentry; (b) others who supplemented the produce of their land by practice of some domestic industry; these would appear most in the manufacturing areas; (c) a class of freeholders whose holding was merely a cottage and a scrap of land, who had to work as day-labourers to gain a living.

2. COPYHOLDERS. These were considerable in number and of two classes, copyholders of inheritance and for lives. They were also divided according to whether the fine paid on taking up a holding was certain or uncertain, i.e. fixed by custom or dependent on the will of the landlord. In the north the copyholder still bore traces of his ancient villein status, for many held by tenures carrying duties of boon-days. In Cumberland two-thirds of the land tenures were of this kind. In wealth copyholders varied almost as much as did freeholders, and copyholds of inheritance with fixed fine were regarded as equal in value to freeholds.

3. FARMERS. These held either by lease, usually for a number of lives, or were mere tenants at will. The landlords foolishly preferred the latter, since it gave them greater freedom in consolidating their estates, but it meant bad farming, since the tenant had no interest in looking ahead and improving the land and tenements accordingly. Middle-sized and small farms were still in the majority, but the tendency towards grouping in larger lots was increasing all the time.

4. Besides these three legitimate classes of landholders there was a considerable number of SQUATTERS, who had built huts on the commons or woods and perhaps cleared a bit of land. These were entirely irregular, but often winked at by landowners. Sometimes the squatters were fairly prosperous, as in Blofield, in Norfolk, which had 700 acres of heath of which 30 squatter families had occupied 40 acres and acquired 23 cows, 18 horses, besides donkeys, pigs, geese, and poultry. But more



often they were mere settlements of hovels, inhabited by the idle or the lawless. The villagers often objected to them and tore down their fences. They are important chiefly because their existence was one of the excuses put forward for the enclosure of commons, and they were purposely used as a blind behind which the eviction from legitimate cottages was effected as well.

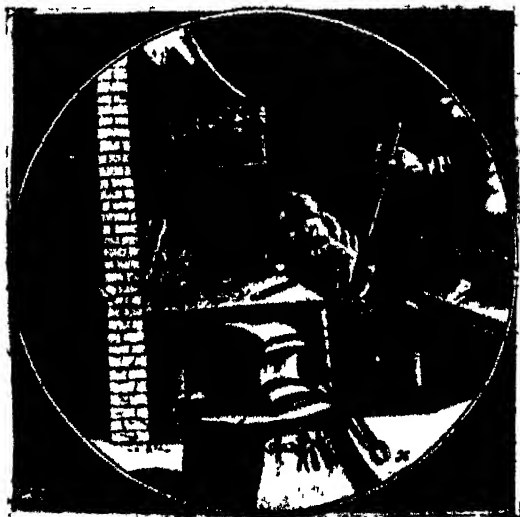
5. THE LABOURERS. These were either married men living in cottages or farm servants living with the farmer. The wage of the former was about 1s. a day, or 1s. 6d. for skilled work, though there was much piece-work, and in many parts they were paid partly in kind.

The farm servants consisted of a bailiff or foreman, ploughman, cow-keeper, shepherd, carter, and dairymaids. They were hired, usually by the year at the hiring fairs, and received a wage and their board. In the south-west, parish children of 7 and 8 years old were often apprenticed to the farmers, and usually treated very badly.

It will be seen from the above that there were many grades of society in the villages of the early eighteenth century, all drawing a livelihood from the land. There was a tendency for the smaller holders to disappear, especially the yeoman, who would sell his freehold and, with the money so obtained, stock a much larger tenant-farm and so make more money; but it was not till after the mid-century that a real agricultural proletariat appeared, dependent for its subsistence on wage-labour alone. Up to 1750 the thrifty farm servant could hope to save, and after perhaps 10 years' service marry with enough money to stock a small tenant farm. With thrift and good management he might hope to rise considerably.

**Agricultural Improvements and the Early Pioneers.** England in the early eighteenth century had a very different appearance from that which meets us now, as we gaze out of our railway carriages on a chequer board of green or golden fields divided by those hedges that to the travelled eye are the glory of our English country and one of the chief memories of the exile.

Not only were at least half the fields of all the country 'open', and in the midlands and south this was the condition of much the greater part, but the quantity of waste and heath was very large. It was at least 10 million acres, probably more, i.e. a third of the entire area. Districts that are now among the most fertile, some of the richest farming land we have, were then mere derelict wastes. From Bridlington to Spurn Head

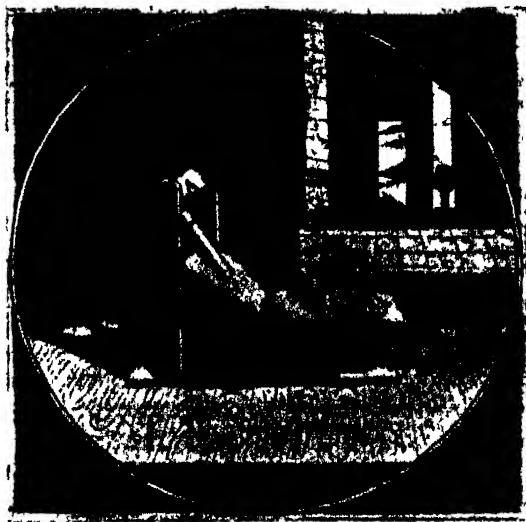


A BLACKSMITH'S SHOP

was an extensive swamp, where willows alone marked out the high road from Beverley to Hull; east of Lincoln and Sleaford was a land as desolate as were the water-logged fens that stretched south and south-east, where now are some of the richest farms in England; round London, Hounslow was still a heath, and Epping Forest something far too desolate and dangerous to be the playground of East London, while deer roamed wild round Enfield; even the Weald of Surrey and Sussex was so little cultivated that it still had posts across it to guide the letter-carriers. Fields had not yet encroached on the bare slopes of

Sussex chalk downs or up the wild high coombes of Dartmoor and Exmoor.

Agriculture, too, still followed the ways of the Middle Ages, and the old rotation of winter corn, summer corn, and fallow still prevailed. But there were pioneers and heralds of a change. For long the Dutch had known and used better methods, and at the beginning of the seventeenth century we borrowed from



A MOUSE-TRAP of the period

them the cultivation of winter roots, and in the early eighteenth of artificial grasses. Both these enabled the Dutch to keep many more cattle through the winter. The changes were, however, confined to a few experimenters, and advocated rather than actually carried out. The early writers of the seventeenth century, such as Platts in 1638 and Blith in 1649, complained loudly of the difficulties in the way of improvement, viz. the absence of security of tenure, which made farmers unwilling to experiment or to sink money in schemes that required years before profit could be hoped for, and above all the open fields

that prevented one man from changing his methods unless all his neighbours did so. No winter crops could be grown where rights of pasture over the common fields existed from August to February. Cross ploughing was impossible on the narrow strips; drainage, if attempted, could be ruined by one careless or obstinate villager, weeds were everywhere, and one lazy



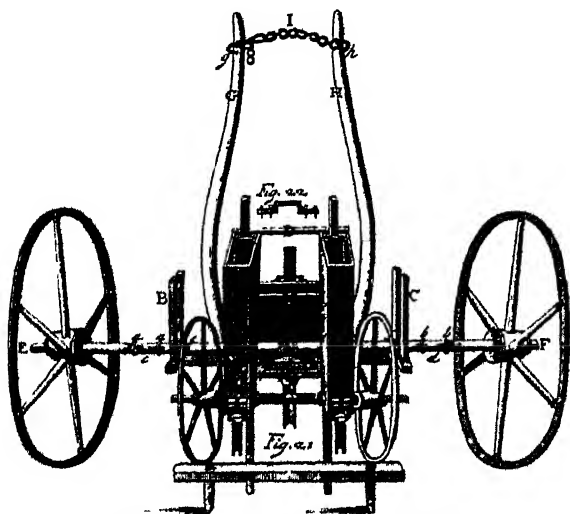
JETHRO TULL. From a contemporary painting.

cultivator could make useless all the diligence of his neighbours. There was serious waste of time in going from strip to strip, often a mile or more away from the village in different directions, in waiting the pleasure of the others to plough or reap. The impossibility of caring properly for cattle and sheep mixed up with everybody else's in often overcrowded pastures, together with the lack of winter food, made the growing of cattle for food a very risky and speculative business. It was therefore only a few men who were enthusiastic enough under such difficulties to try for better things. JETHRO TULL, one of the earliest

worked in the face of the greatest difficulties, including a strike of labourers, who objected to sowing seed in rows and thinly spread, when, as everybody knew, the proper way was to scatter broadcast and as thickly as possible. Born in 1674 after a varied career in law, music, and travel, Tull settled down at the age of 25 to study farming with brains. His great contribution to the subject was his proof of the value of sowing in rows with constant hoeing of the ground between. He invente

a machine for sowing seed, and worked on the principle that constant stirring up of the land could take the place of manure. By breaking up the soil he let air and rain into the roots and avoided the crop of weeds that always followed the use of farmyard manure. The constant tillage kept down the weeds as well, and he found he could grow without fallow crop after crop of wheat, and heavier than those of his neighbours.

But all such proofs of better methods were lost on the open-



JETHRO TULL'S WHEAT DRILL

field farmer, and it was not till the great landlords took up the question of farming that any real progress was made. The first of these great men was CHARLES VISCOUNT TOWNSHEND, who in 1730, having quarrelled with Walpole, retired from political life to his estates in Norfolk. His main contribution to the science was his study of the rotation of crops. His land was of the poorest; its chief products were described as 'nettles and warrens'. First he revived the use of marl, and then started growing turnips. Following Tull, he drilled and horse-hoed. Lastly, he devised a four-course rotation of crops, by which he

aved the year of fallow. The idea was to introduce a profitable crop which would do for the land what the fallow did. Such crops are roots, especially turnips, and grasses like clover. Both of these could be used for winter food for beasts, hence the farmer could keep larger stocks and get more manure; the usual rotation was wheat, turnips, barley, clover. So successful was Townshend and those who followed him on Norfolk lands that he has come down to posterity as 'Turnip Townshend'.



CHARLES VISCOUNT  
TOWNSHEND

**Summary.** 1. The chief feature of the period is the predominance obtained by the greater landed interest. They had secured control of Parliament, and the power of the Crown steadily lessened, consequently they were able to rule the country in their own interest. The chief measures which secured their position were the abolition of military tenures and the Act of Settlement.

2. The population of rural England still consisted of various classes with graduated wealth and position. There

was not as yet any great gap in the social ladder, though the tendency was for small holders to drop out and the land to accumulate in the hands of the few. There was a class of wage labourers, but comparatively few were absolutely dependent on these earnings; most of them held some small parcel of land or could hope by thrift and energy to do so.

3. The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries heard much discussion of agricultural improvements and some experiments and changes were made, chiefly in the cultivation of roots and grasses. But open-field farming stood in the way of progress

and such experiments as were made were, for the most part, the work of great landowners. The most noted pioneer of this piece of progress was Townshend, who revolutionized the agriculture of Norfolk and turned it from one of the poorest agricultural parts of England to one of the richest.

## 2. Manufacture, Trade, and Commerce

It was during this period that the shifting of the manufacturing centres of England began to produce that redistribution of the population which makes the centres of modern English life so different from those of the Middle Ages

In the wool trade the rise of Yorkshire is the chief event. Up to 1700 the great centre of the woollen manufacture was East Anglia, especially Norfolk. For some time in the villages on the Yorkshire hills a domestic system of wool-weaving and spinning had been growing. Norfolk itself was dependent



JOHN KAY

largely on Yorkshire yarn, spun from the long wool of Yorkshire sheep, for its manufacture of worsteds and silk and wool mixtures. The Norfolk sheep could only supply short wool, which in its turn found its way to Yorkshire weavers to be made into cloth. Naturally if Yorkshire could make the yarn it came about that her more enterprising inhabitants should try to weave it too. So she gradually rose to rival Norfolk in the latter's coarser fabrics, as well as making her own cloth. Owing to a large increase of trade, there was room at first for both, but with the advent of machinery after 1780 the natural advantages of coal and iron fields in Yorkshire enabled that county to secure so

great a lead that, when at last the new methods broke through the conservatism of the Norfolk manufacture, it was too late for the latter to recover. The invention of Kay's flying shuttle in 1733 was a boon to the broadcloth weavers of Yorkshire, but of less value to the narrow Norfolk looms. In the first case it substituted one man for two, so that the domestic workers could earn more; in the second the benefit to the individual wage-earner was small, he might work more quickly, but he earned no more per piece. The expansion of the wool industry was not, however, as great as it might have been, owing to the government policy of starving foreign manufacturers of wool, by prohibiting export. This, combined with the policy of encouraging corn-growing by bounties, tended to turn pasture to arable and so produce less wool.

The cotton industry was discouraged by Parliament, for it rivalled the wool trade and gave no work to English farmers. In 1720 the use of calico was even forbidden.

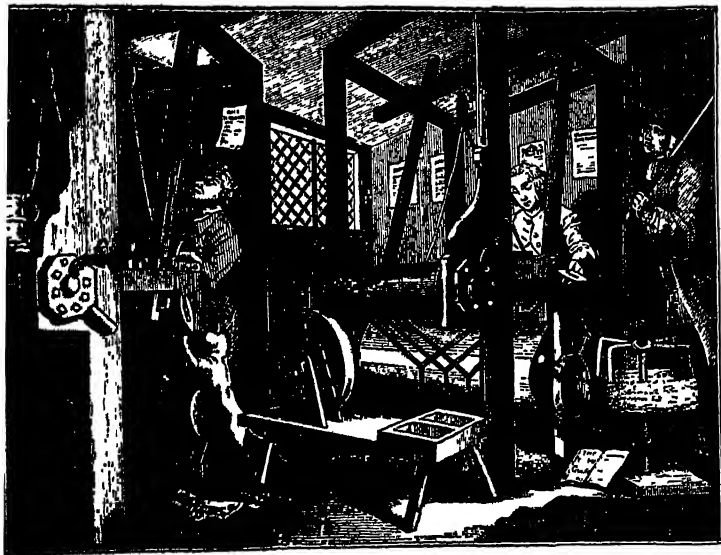
The linen trade flourished in Scotland, especially after the Union in 1707, less so in Ireland. The Irish were only allowed to sell linen goods to the colonies, while Scotland had the same markets as England. The English feared that if we encouraged Irish linen too much our trade from Holland would suffer and with it our cloth export to the Dutch markets.

The iron industry, as we saw, had already shifted during our last period. In 1735 Abraham Darby made coke from coal and substituted this for wood charcoal in smelting. In 1766 a reverberatory furnace for using coal to convert pig-iron to bar-iron was invented, and from that time onwards the connexion between iron manufacture and coalfields was established. The iron industry affords a good illustration of the narrowly selfish outlook of the age. A proposal to encourage smelting in the colonies was opposed by the ironmasters who owned the forges, the proprietors of woods who feared their value would decrease, and the farmers who used the bark of the trees. The manufacturers of iron articles, however, supported the proposal, but only so far as the production of pig and bar iron.



The coal trade was so far almost confined to Newcastle, though there had always been some mining in Yorkshire. The hostmen of Newcastle were incorporated by Elizabeth, but the charter was not renewed after 1679 and the trade became free. After 1750 it increased enormously.

Many industries, especially textiles, received fresh impetus from the French immigration that followed the Revocation of



WEAVING. The apprentice holds a flying shuttle in his left hand

the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685. For a century French Huguenots, protected by the Edict of Toleration issued by Henri IV, had prospered, and they now formed a large portion of the industrial part of the nation. They were skilled artisans or capitalist organizers of manufacture, just that part of itself the French nation could least do without. To the number of 80,000 they were made a present to a rival nation by the bigotry of a blind despot. The total number that left France was at least five times the above estimate of those coming to England.

Some even managed to bring away their plant and their capital, many brought only their lives and their skill. The advantage to English industry was great. Wiser than their ancestors, the Englishmen of 1685 for the most part welcomed the refugees. They settled mainly in London, though some passed on to America, Ireland, and Scotland. They gave fresh life to our silk manufacture, henceforth settled in Spitalfields; in Soho they set up many trades, improving them both by their skill and taste; to Ipswich they took the manufacture of sail-cloth, and they gave new life to the linen looms of Ireland and Scotland.

**Spread of the Capitalist System.** Although the greater part of English industry was organized under the domestic system, its control was passing more and more into the hands of the large capitalists. The change came by degrees and more quickly in some places and trades than others. With it came the usual labour troubles, and the attempts of the employers to meet them. Already in 1718 there was a proclamation against 'unlawful clubs', which on closer scrutiny turn out to be trade unions. In 1721 there was an association among the working tailors, and in 1727 combination among wool workers was made illegal. At the same time the employers were allowed to combine to protect themselves against fraudulent neglect or theft on the part of the workers. In 1754 there was a strike at Norwich of 300 wool weavers, who were supported for six weeks by their fellow workmen. There is also evidence of the existence of an employing and a wage-earning class among the spinning and the cloth-finishing trades. Even the felt-makers, who, it will be remembered, were a company of small masters that broke from the tyranny of the capitalist haberdashers early in the seventeenth century, became after the Restoration a body of capitalist employers.

The system, however, is most evident in new trades or those where the plant required was expensive. Gun-making in Birmingham, paper, glass, the improved silk manufacture brought over by the Huguenots belong to the former class, the framework knitters were a good example of the latter. The

stocking frame was invented in the time of Elizabeth and a chartered company formed, but early in the eighteenth century we find the journeymen struggling to force the masters to keep the rules, and failing. The recalcitrant masters migrated to Nottingham and Leicester, successfully used the House of Commons to prevent the London company enforcing its rules, and the very worst forms of capitalist evils rapidly spread through the industry. Most of the work was done by parish apprentices and the journeymen were constantly unemployed. The apprentices were unprotected and consequently badly treated.

The passing of Truck Acts is also a sign of the spread of a wage-earning class. A system of paying partly in food or goods, which, in a simpler society, had been quite good and useful, became merely a plan for swindling the worker and has been gradually put an end to in trade after trade. An Act, in 1701, forbade payment of wages in 'cloth, victuals or commodities' instead of in coin, in the textile and iron industries. But the custom grew throughout the eighteenth century.

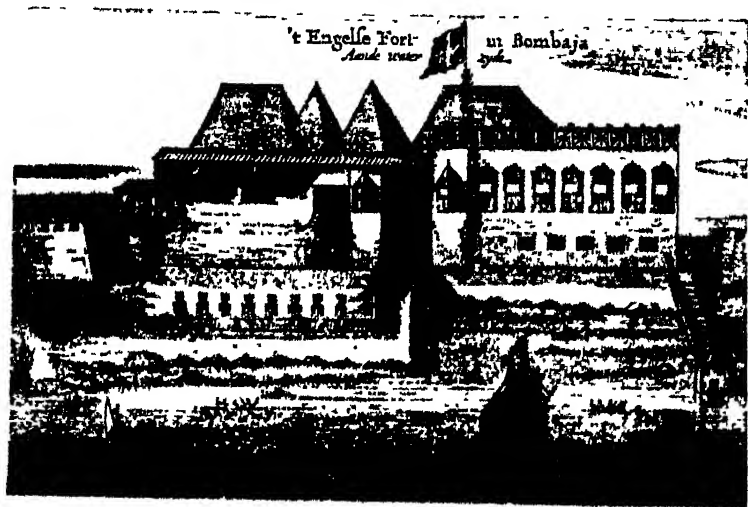
**The Fate of the Regulated and Joint-stock Companies.** For a few years under Cromwell trade had been open and free to all, but the system was not regarded as a success and the Companies were revived. They gradually lost their importance in European markets, but in far-distant or half-civilized countries their uses remained. It was important that there should be an authority whom the foreign states could hold responsible for the actions of traders, and naturally the Company could not be responsible for non-members over whom it had no control. On the other hand, the native government could not be expected to distinguish one Englishman from another. After 1689 the exclusiveness of the great Companies was largely abolished, the entrance fee lowered and membership thrown open to all who cared to pay the small sum demanded. Regulation and control continued however, to a considerable extent.

The Eastland Company seems to have been less of a monopoly than others, and the Baltic trade was gradually thrown open. It was, however, eventually secured by the Dutch.

The same thing happened to the Muscovy Company, whose trade was in 1697 thrown practically open by lowering the entrance fee to £5.

The Turkey Company was not finally thrown open till 1753. It was the earliest of our trade rivalries with France.

The Company whose history is of increasing importance after 1660 is the EAST INDIA. Up to 1701 it was spending much energy and capital in fighting 'interlopers'. There were serious



BOMBAY FORT FROM THE SEA

reasons for this attitude, apart from the desire of its members to keep to themselves a valuable trade. The trouble and expense of securing trading rights in India had been great, and it was fair that the company that paid for them should enjoy them. Agreements and conventions with native courts must be conducted by a corporation, not by individuals; interlopers used the privileges and repudiated the conditions agreed on by the Company. Much of the interloping trade was mere piracy, but the Company was held responsible for its misdeeds. A real source of complaint, however, was the Company's inability to

control its own servants, who by private trade, often of a very doubtful character, made huge fortunes. This the authority seemed powerless to prevent. The irritation at the East India monopoly was so great that a rival company, not confined to London merchants, was formed in 1697. The position, however, proved intolerable, and in 1708 the two companies were amalgamated.

Meanwhile events were turning a merely trading company into

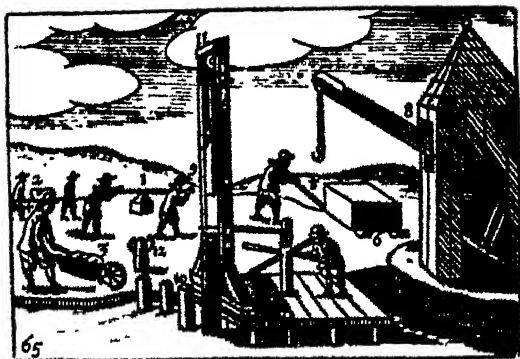


PRINCE OF WALES' FORT, HUDSON BAY

a holder of territorial sovereignty. Power to execute martial law and admiralty jurisdiction in Bombay was already theirs; they kept a small force of soldiers and were allowed to fortify Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. By 1708 the Company had 9 factories in Western India, 3 in Persia, 7 in Southern India, 8 in Bengal. Still, so far there was no idea beyond the protection of their trade, and Portuguese, French, Dutch, and Danes exercised similar privileges and trading rights. In the anarchy that followed the death of Aurungzebe in 1707 and the rise of the Mahratta power the English remained neutral; the ambition

of Duplex and Clive, not the needs of a trading company, produced that interference with native quarrels that led eventually to our Indian Empire.

AFRICAN COMPANIES began in 1618 and followed the usual course, but were handicapped by competition of the East India traders, who used their stations and factories. In 1672 a joint-stock company for the African trade was floated, but was not very successful; in 1698 the trade was thrown open. Later the company was threatened with bankruptcy, and in 1730



'VARIOUS ENGINES'

a Parliamentary annual grant was made to keep up the trading stations; in 1750 its affairs were wound up.

THE HUDSON BAY COMPANY was founded in 1670 by two French Huguenots, with Prince Rupert as governor. It was favoured by the government because it was a direct rival to the French, who then held Quebec. The English had the advantage of shipping and used the Hudson Strait instead of the long route overland. After some misfortunes, Hudson Bay was secured to the English by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. In spite of bitter attacks on its unenterprising methods, the company held its own. In dealing with numbers of scattered Indians and half-breed trappers the regulated trade and even the monopoly of a joint-stock company proved best. It held its exclusive rights till 1869.

**Transit.** At the end of the seventeenth century the roads of England had sunk to a condition that was almost desperate. People travelling by the high roads were quite likely to lose their way. Even in fine weather coaches would stick in the slough till pulled out by teams of oxen. In the winter floods often barred the way for days at a time. A viceroy travelling to Ireland in 1685 took 5 hours to travel the 14 miles between St. Asaph and Conway, and coaches in the Weald were usually drawn by oxen. In the west and south-west everything was



VARIOUS METHODS OF TRANSPORT

carried on horseback; in Cardigan villages in 1730 sledges were used instead of wagons. The main cause of the state of the roads was the want of any generally responsible authority. Each parish was responsible for the part that passed through it, an obvious injustice that was evaded by neglect. An Act was passed in 1675 authorizing turnpikes on a part of the great north road, a system bitterly opposed, but gradually extended to most of the main routes of traffic. It was not till 1773 that an Act was passed providing for the proper upkeep of all roads.

The cost of transit along such roads was enormous and must have seriously interfered with trade. Coal was only conveyed by water, hence its early name of sea-coal. Just at the end of our period the making of canals was started, the first being

that from Worsley to Manchester, 11 miles, built by the enterprise of the Duke of Bridgwater.

The amount of English shipping steadily increased throughout the period. Not only was trade extending so that English exports multiplied in value by six between 1660 and 1750, while the imports remained about the same, but the quantity of English shipping calling at English ports had increased from two-thirds to ten-elevenths of the total. What share in this increase was due to the NAVIGATION ACT of 1651, which compelled English trade to be carried only in English ships or in those of the country in which the import was produced, is disputed. The government was not content with this measure only. It encouraged the formation of Fishery Companies to wrest the fisheries from the Dutch, but they were not very successful. This method failing, they fell back on the favourite device of the time, and in 1733 a bounty of 20s. per ton was offered on vessels engaged in the whale fishery. In 1704 an Act was passed giving substantial bounties on colonial-made pitch, tar, hemp, masts, and spars. These measures were not, however, very successful. Attempts were also made to secure a reserve of sailors for the fleet and to increase the attractions of the merchant service, while the dangers of the English coast were a little lessened by the beginning of lighthouse building. Some, like the first Eddystone, were built by private enterprise, others by the Trinity House out of levies made on all shipping. Harbours too were cared for, and much quiet improvement went on during the long peace of Walpole's twenty years' administration.

**The Beginnings of Insurance.** There was a certain amount of insurance of ships in the fifteenth century in southern Europe, and by 1574 there seems to have been a number of people thus engaged in London. After the Restoration we find societies started for fire, and a little later for life, insurance. At first they were private ventures or joint-stock companies, one at least being set up by a woman for insurance on births, marriages, and services, and carried on successfully. Very often they were little more than bogus concerns run by company promoters.



Marine insurances by joint-stock appeared in 1720, when the London Assurance and the Royal Exchange Assurance were founded. The origin of Lloyd's is interesting. Persons connected with shipping were in the habit of meeting at a coffee-house kept by one Edward Lloyd, who also published a paper concerning foreign and commercial news. In 1726 he brought



RUDYERD'S EDDYSTONE LIGHTHOUSE, built in 1708.

out *Lloyd's List*, with shipping news, rates of exchange, &c. Eventually this was taken over by the brokers and underwriters themselves, and in 1774 they settled in premises in the Royal Exchange. They disapproved of life insurance as being speculative and likely to induce abuses, and so to this day marine insurance stands apart from all other.

**Comparison between External Trade in 1700, 1750, and 1913.** During the period 1700-1750 the external trade of England increased 62 per cent., from over 10½ millions to about 17½ millions. By 1913 it had reached 1,403 millions; it had multiplied 80 times.

Between the same dates the trade per head of the population increased about 60 per cent., for the population was almost stationary; by 1913 the trade per head was 11 times what it was in 1750.

**Summary.** 1. In manufactures the chief event of the time is the beginning of a transfer of the wool industry from Norwich to Yorkshire. Up to 1750 it was rather an increase in Yorkshire than a decrease in Norfolk that has to be noted. Cotton was discouraged, linen flourished in Scotland, iron manufacture became permanently located in the coal fields.

2. Capitalism increased, the number of pure wage-earners grew greater, and labour began to organize.

3. The regulated and joint-stock companies continued through the period, but after 1689 their exclusiveness was modified, and there was a gradual tendency towards 'open', though still regulated, trade.

4. All through the period transit difficulties were great. The roads had long been neglected and were in a shocking condition. Turnpikes as a remedy proved a failure. Shipping increased steadily and was fostered by the government.

5. Commercial insurance began in the early eighteenth century; speculative at first, it soon established itself solidly as part of our trade system.

### 3. Government Policies and Taxation

THE outstanding feature of the period was, as we have seen, the control of the government by the landed interest. Not only were the parliaments of the Restoration filled with country squires and cavaliers, but even the element that secured the Revolution of 1688 was largely composed of the same class, and the great Whig families that governed the country for the first half of the eighteenth century had their prosperity securely rooted in the soil. It is true that the financial and commercial classes were equally attached by interest to the Hanoverian

succession, but taking it all round there was probably no period in our history when the English so dearly 'loved a lord', or when the power of the landed aristocracy was so unchallenged. In the Middle Ages their power was at least equalled by that of the Crown and the Church, the Tudor policy had largely passed them by in favour of parvenus from the city or the lesser gentry, the age that followed was to see their gradual replacement by a plutocracy, the sources of whose wealth and power lay not in land but in trade. But for over a century the land and its owners were the first consideration of the government, and the rents arising from it were the test of the nation's prosperity. We have already seen how the Act of Settlement secured for the landholder a reserve of cheap labour which was powerless to defend itself. During the early eighteenth century a succession of good harvests, and a considerable increase in the commerce of the nation kept prices down and work fairly plentiful, but with the coming of the great wars irretrievable disaster threatened the mass of the wage-earning people, tied almost as much to the soil as their ancestors of the fourteenth century.

**Protection.** Sufficient labour being secured, the next step was to obtain a high remunerative price for the produce of the land. During the Tudor period the growth of London had forced the government control of the corn trade to be subservient to that city's needs, and though export was in law allowed it had not in practice been great. In 1660 not only was export allowed when wheat was below 40s. a quarter, but small import duties were imposed on foreign wheat. In 1663 the price below which export was allowed was raised to 48s. and the import duty increased to 5s. 4d. In 1669 import was prohibited in times of plenty. In 1670 all limit on export was removed and the import duty raised to 16s. unless home prices rose above 53s. 4d. In 1673 a fresh experiment was made in the interest of the land owner. A bounty of 5s. on wheat and lesser sums on other grains were allowed on all corn exported in English ships provided the price was not above 48s. In 1689 this plan wa

revived, and on this combination of bounty on export and duty on import the corn trade was regulated throughout the eighteenth century. The whole idea was to encourage corn-growing by protecting the producer against lowered prices due either to an extraordinarily good season or the import of foreign corn. Only when prices rose to something like famine rates were the import duties largely lowered. To that small extent alone was the interest of the consumer considered.

The import of cattle was also restricted in the interest of the English landowner, for fat cattle from beyond the seas were forbidden, and a blow thus struck at an increasingly prosperous Irish export. The rise in the value of pasture land, noted by Defoe, indicated an increasing attention to this branch of farming.

**Policy Regarding Industries and Commerce.** The policy of the English government after the Revolution, as to the relative rôles of trade and industry, was a copy of that which Colbert was apparently making so successful in France. The value of each particular trade was gauged by its effect on English industry. Exports were the all-important thing, imports a sort of necessary evil by which we had to be paid for our sales. It was desirable to trade with any country to whom we sold much and from whom we bought little, above all it was undesirable to import goods that should in any way rival our own productions. This theory of economics fitted in well with post-Revolution politics. For more than a century English statesmen lived in real terror of the power of France. Should we then help her power by offering a market for her manufactures and so increase her wealth and prejudice our own output? When Colbert in 1667 prohibited English cloth from entering France, an agitation began for the cessation of all trade with France, and in 1678 an Act to that effect was passed. The policy was more or less maintained for the next century.

This fear and jealousy of France is well illustrated in the history of two treaties, the METHUEN TREATY of 1703 with Portugal, and the commercial clauses of the TREATY OF UTRECHT

in 1713. The import trade with France was mainly in wines, brandies and silks; that with Portugal largely wines. To France we exported certain cloth made of Spanish wool, but not much else; Portugal was a large market for our cloth. In 1703 this market was threatened by the beginnings of a cloth manufacture in Portugal, started in 1680 by an enterprising Irishman. To protect this infant industry the Portuguese had prohibited the importation of all English cloth. Methuen was sent out to negotiate for the removal of the embargo. In return for free admittance of English cloth to Portugal, he promised that Portuguese wines should be admitted to England at two-thirds the duty payable on French wines. From this time the drinking of port was regarded as a patriotic duty by the English squire. Since, however, Portugal took more cloth than even our three-bottle ancestors could consume in wine, a large quantity of bullion flowed into England from the Portuguese trade, and according to the ideas of the time this was eminently satisfactory. Not even the large smuggling trade that grew up between France and England disturbed the satisfaction.

But ten years later there was a growing feeling among certain sections of the community that barriers put on trade were not in the long run good for the nation, and at the Treaty of Utrecht Bolingbroke made an agreement with France to revert to the custom of 1664, when French goods were admitted to England on the same terms as those of any other nation, the tariff on English imports to France to remain as they had been at the same date. Immediately it became evident that the commercial classes held rigidly to the current theories. The silk manufacturers would be ruined, the woollen industry seriously injured, the linen manufacture stifled. To break the Methuen treaty would lose the Portuguese cloth market and the French trade would drain the country of bullion. The controversy was bitter; the defenders of the new treaty did not challenge the theory of the balance of trade, but they did advance two important points, that trade was desirable with as many peoples and markets as possible, that political aims should not be mixed up with economic

ones. In the words of the pamphleteer, 'The language of nations to one another is, "I let thee gain by me, that I may gain by thee . . ." To bar up trade with a nation, because we differ in state matters and political interests, is the greatest absurdity that a nation can be guilty of.' But the majority thought otherwise, and the commercial clauses of the treaty were not confirmed by Parliament.

In the story of these treaties the domination of the woollen interest is clear. Parliament even introduced sumptuary laws to protect it, forbidding, for instance, the use of silk instead of serge for buttonholes in 1738, and fining those who wore French cambrie or lawn in 1745.

The East India Company too suffered from criticism on exactly the same grounds. The attack was not so much now on account of its export of silver, as for its import of textiles. Indian muslins and silks were becoming the fashion and were thought to be damaging the home producer. The order of argument used is interesting. The products of Indian cheap labour ousted the work of English craftsmen, this in turn would lessen the demand for English wool and thus damage the rents of the landowners. It is obvious in whose hands the final decision lay. In 1700 certain scheduled East India goods had to be re-exported and were not allowed to be sold in the country.

Such being the policy of the predominant parties, it only remains to note the means they adopted for the encouragement of industry. The principal one has already been mentioned in the case of agriculture; bounties were not confined to corn but were offered for any new or feeble industry. Some have been mentioned, such as those on boats for the whale fishery on hemp and naval stores manufactured in the colonies. Other were on the building of big ships, on silk, &c. Bounties for new industries, high tariffs to keep out rivals of both old and new these seemed to eighteenth-century English statesmen the obvious duty. That the articles produced by industries so artificially bolstered up must be unduly dear and that the consumer paid unnecessarily heavily for everything he require

did not apparently trouble them, even if they ever reflected on the subject.

**Parliament Replaces the Privy Council.** It will have become evident that the constitutional method of economic control had completely changed. Under Elizabeth Parliament passed general regulations and left the government to carry out the details. We saw how an efficient Privy Council carried state control into every nook and cranny of the realm. After 1660 the Privy Council ceased to rule in home politics. Parliament assumed the right not merely to legislate but also to control administration, and from the point of view of industry there is no question that it was the less efficient instrument. It was too clumsy, too slow to move, too much affected by popular passion and sentiment to carry out so delicate a task. Above all, in the clash of warring interests it was too much exposed to the temptations of bribery. The corruption of public life in the eighteenth century was on something the same scale as that of the later Roman Republic, an octopus whose tentacles embraced the whole body politic. Only a highly trained professional body of officials, free to act and alter from day to day, can carry out successfully a minute control of industry; under the looser parliamentary control evasion of the law was rife. It is not surprising that the dominant figures in the popular imagination of the eighteenth century are the smuggler and the highwayman.

**The Relief of Poverty.** The careful administration of the Poor Law of 1601 ceased with the downfall of the monarchy, while the Civil War naturally increased the vagrant class. We have already noticed the abuses that led to the Act of Settlement of 1662 and the still worse evils that followed in its train. The increased industry of the country did not succeed in employing the bulk of the casual and squatter class; the progress of enclosures, though slow, still threw out of regular employment a considerable number of agricultural labourers; and during the period 1660-1723 the poor-rate rose continuously. Many remedies were proposed, all based on the idea of setting the pauper to work, but it was not easy. Agriculture did not need

him, the growing organization of industry demanded a skill he did not possess, and often no doubt he was work-shy and preferred a meagre but easy existence as a squatter on the waste. It is difficult to judge how far in the eighteenth century idleness was really the cause of poverty, for the bitter invectives on the subject come from men who thought a labourer and his family idle who did not work from sunrise to sunset, and believed it to be of national advantage that little children of four years of age should earn their keep. This too in an age when the men of the well-to-do classes did less work of value to themselves or any one else than at any period of our history. One inevitably suspects that class feeling rather than moral indignation is at the back of their strictures. Attempts to find work for the pauper were made all over the country at different times, and in 1723 an Act was passed empowering every parish to build a workhouse for this purpose. The plan adopted in most places was to farm out the poor to a contractor, who was either paid a lump sum for the job, in which case he made it his business to admit as few people as possible and with that object made the place so intolerable as to induce people to starve on the merest pittance rather than enter it; or he was allowed so much per head plus the value of their work, in which case he desired to admit many and overwork them. It is hardly possible to suppose that consideration for the poor was at the back of a plan which put a premium on their oppression, and we must look to the other aspect of the poor law for the cause. The poor rate had become very large and was a heavy drain on the poorer farmers, so the one idea of the overseers of the poor was to keep down the rates. In this, after 1723, they were very successful, and contemporaries quoted the dwindling poor rate as proof of national prosperity; it was much more a sign of increasing brutality and material selfishness.

**Colonial Policy.** The idea that the welfare of the colonies should be entirely subservient to that of the mother country persisted for another century. The English traders had no



intention of sharing their European markets with the emigrants across the sea or even with the sister kingdoms of Scotland and Ireland. By means of the Navigation Act they forced the colonists to buy what they needed from England only, and to carry all they wished to sell to English ports first for distribution. The interference was mainly with the trade of the Southern States of Virginia and Carolina and of the West Indies. The West Indies received more attention than any other colony; these



islands traded with New England as well as with the home country and carried on a lucrative but illicit commerce with Spanish and Portuguese America. New England suffered from the anti-French policy of the home government, and the attempts to prevent their trade with the French plantations were greatly resented. The French Newfoundland fisheries enabled the New England colonists to buy considerable quantities of French wines, brandies, and other goods; several of the West Indies were in French hands, and the northern colonists saw no reason for confining their trade to the English islands. Attempts to discourage the trade failed, and the English government was still

further annoyed by the colonists supplying French plantations with food during the war. It is not surprising that friction was constant. From the point of view of the home government the colonists were a dangerous potential rival to English industry and trade, from that of the colonists the selfish interference of a parliament in which they had no voice was far more galling than any former control by the Crown. To the English parliament there seemed yet another danger: prosperous colonies might prove a source of power to a would-be autocratic monarch. This was especially the case with Scotland and Ireland. In Scotland the Darien Scheme brought matters to a head. By this it was proposed to establish a settlement capable of making war and foreign agreements, besides which it was to possess a free port, in distinct opposition to the English navigation policy. There was some possibility that it might interfere with the monopoly of the East India Company. Although the scheme failed, the English authorities realized that the only way to avoid such rivalry was by the parliamentary union of the two countries. This was accomplished in 1707; Scotland made a good bargain in the business and prospered considerably.

But Ireland was much more injured by the English policy than either the American colonies or Scotland. The navigation policy stopped her trade with the Continent, her industries were penalized continually to make way for those of England, worst of all the corn policy kept her from any progress in tillage. By the help of bounties English corn could be sold in Dublin cheaper than Irish corn could be grown. To save the English forests the import of Irish bar-iron and even of Irish timber was encouraged. Irish cattle and Irish wool were, on the other hand, discouraged by legislation in the interest of the English farmer of pasture land; it was a suicidal policy. Irish wool was smuggled to the Continent and fed the very industries that rivalled ours most surely, and Irish victuals went to supply French and Dutch ships. Finally, nothing was done to facilitate any industry, agricultural or other, that might attract capital to the sister isle.

A few words must be said on one of the most lucrative trades of the eighteenth century, that in West African slaves. It was of enormous extent, a moderate estimate being an average of 20,000 a year between 1680 and 1786. In 1771 there were 190 English ships engaged in it. It was believed at the time that it benefited England, in that slave plantations prevented the colonists becoming self-sufficing communities independent of the mother country. This belief in what we should now regard as a dubious advantage was not balanced by any humanitarian considerations. This is hardly surprising in an age that hanged children for theft and regarded the labourer as little more than a beast of burden. That peculiar turn of mind that sees subjects for compassion in the oppressed of far-away lands, from Armenia to the Pacific, while it shuts its eyes to the misery and tyranny at its own gates, was not a product of the eighteenth century. That sceptical age was frankly selfish and entirely self-satisfied. Negro slaves were merely so much profitable merchandise.

**Banking. The National Debt.** Perhaps the most far-reaching event in the economic history of the time was the foundation of the BANK OF ENGLAND in 1694. Governments had always borrowed money, especially in war time, frequently on the security of parts of the anticipated royal income. The Bank of England was founded as a sort of monopolist in the business. A sum of £1,200,000 was subscribed by certain people, who formed a company; this was lent to the government, who, in return, guaranteed an annual interest of £100,000, but did not undertake to repay the principal. The bank was to carry on ordinary banking business; that is, it received money on deposit and lent it out at interest. This had already been done by the goldsmiths; the new departure of the bank was that it lent in the form of bills or notes, not gold but paper. This it could safely do because of the £100,000 regular income it held in the interest paid by government. Consequently it could, in a sense, lend more money than it actually possessed. At first this new idea of circulating credit was viewed with some suspicion, but

when it was found that the government would accept these notes, as well as bills on the exchequer which bore interest, in payment of taxes, the plan of trading with paper money was accepted and found to be useful. It really amounted to this : the bank lent out, not gold, but a promise to pay gold on demand ; A, who borrowed this promise, paid B with it instead of in coins, B passed it on to C, and so on. Eventually it got back to the bank, who did actually hand out gold for it, but as only a part of the notes came in at once, the bank, secure in the annual interest due from the government, could be sure of paying that much. The effect of this system of credit on commerce was at first very uncertain. The breakdown of the monopolies of the regulated companies produced the wildest speculation, and the bank had to learn by experience when to lend and when to refuse, but it did learn in time, and during the first years the government helped it through one or two crises. This foundation of the Bank of England, which we may note is all through merely a private company, is the beginning of our National Debt, a steadily increasing sum of money borrowed from a large section of the nation on which the whole nation has to pay the interest. Walpole initiated a Sinking Fund, i.e. an allocation of certain sums from each year's income to pay off part of the debt, but the fund was rarely kept intact. It is now the policy in time of peace to pay off sums continuously, but each successive war adds to the debt on which succeeding generations continue to pay the interest.

Whether the new scheme of trading and governing by credit was a good one has been disputed ; one certainly good effect it had at the time, it tied the moneyed interest to the settlement of the Revolution. The return of the Stuarts would mean a certain repudiation of the large debt incurred by the ' usurping ' government, and it was therefore to the interest of all who had lent the money to keep their debtors in power. In the days of not very popular German princes on the English throne, this was an important factor in the struggle.

Two years later, in 1696, the government took in hand

much needed work of re-coining. The condition of the currency was not due to debasement, as had been the case in the sixteenth century, but to the bad wearing capacity of the coins. Up to 1663 all coins had been hammered, and they varied considerably in size and weight. At that date the mill and press were introduced and new coins issued. The old ones had deteriorated by constant clipping, easy to do when the edges were smooth and the weights regular, consequently new coins were hoarded and even melted down, while the old got worse and worse and the quantity in circulation less. The worn coins were easily imitated, and there was much false money about. Prices for goods paid in silver rose as the coins got worse and the bad exchange abroad made the payments of the army difficult. In 1696 Sir Isaac Newton was put in charge of a recoinage, which was effected in two years at a cost to the government of £2,400,000. The benefit obtained by the foreign exchange somewhat balanced this amount.

**Taxation.** During the Civil War and period of the Commonwealth several experiments in taxation had been made. The property tax had been collected from the occupier, who could deduct it afterwards from his rent; this had been done during the war, owing to the numerous absentees among the landlords. A proper assessment had been made, so that the tax was more



THE BANK OF ENGLAND. The original building.

fairly distributed. Lastly, at the instance of Pym, a tax known as an **EXCISE** was copied from the Dutch. This was a duty on certain things consumed within the country; it got its name from the idea that it was an 'excision' of part of the article. It was for a long time a most unpopular form of taxation and bitterly opposed, especially on such things as flesh and salt. When, however, those on the actual necessities of life were removed, men settled down into accepting it.

When in 1660 the monarchy was restored, many of the expedients of the parliamentary party were revived. We have already seen how the landed interest got rid of their feudal rents, and the £100,000 thus lost to the king was eventually restored to him, after considerable discussion, by an excise on beer, ale, and other liquors granted to the king and his heirs. This was called the hereditary excise, and the act granting it is still on the statute book. A similar grant was given the king for life. Customs were also granted of 5 per cent., with a tunnage on wine. The question of the demesne lands came up; they had been largely alienated by the kings, although, strictly speaking, the 'ancient demesne' of Edward the Confessor was regarded as national not royal property. There was not a great deal left by 1640 and that little the Parliament sold; some was eventually restored, but by 1663 its revenue was only £100,000. At the present day the crown lands are only worth £500,000, which is about the same.

During the reign of Charles II a Hearth Tax of 2s. on every hearth, except in cottages, was introduced. For special needs, such as war, recourse was had to a poll-tax, or the old Tudor subsidy. Altogether the regular peace revenue was estimated at £1,200,000.

At the Revolution then the principal taxes in existence were  
Direct Tax.   Hearth Tax.

Indirect Taxes.	{	Customs. Five per cent. on goods imported or exported, tunnage on wine, duty on woollen cloth and special duties levied in 1685.
		Excise. The Hereditary and the Temporary Excise.

On the accession of William and Mary one great change was made in granting the customs for a term of years, instead of for life, the object being to make government without parliament impossible. For extraordinary occasions poll taxes were granted, but though these were quick to collect there was an enormous number of evasions; the last collected was in 1698. From 1695 to 1706 a curious plan was tried of taxing births, marriages



ENGLISH HATRED OF EXCISE. Cartoon showing the Lion and the Unicorn yoked to a beer-barrel.

and funerals, bachelors and widows. For the Hearth Tax was substituted a tax on houses with more than a certain number of windows. In 1694 the first stamp duties were imposed on legal documents and law proceedings. Lastly, a property tax was levied, which, owing to difficulties of collection, ended by becoming merely a land tax, and, like the old tenths and fifteenths of the Middle Ages, to mean a certain sum collected according to the assessment of 1692. Thus a rate of 1s. was taken to mean half a million apportioned as usual. The tax lasted till 1798,

when it was converted by Pitt into a perpetual rent charge, redeemable by the payers.

From this time to the end of the Seven Years War the taxation of the country increased considerably, but there were no striking departures into new fields of revenue. Walpole tried to facilitate trade by removing many of the restrictions; he removed export duties from 106 articles manufactured in Britain and import duties on raw materials, drugs and naval stores. But when he tried to go further he was met by bitter opposition. His idea was to make London a free port, to remove all restrictions on trade carrying produce from one foreign port to another but calling at London en route. He proposed to remove duties on foreign imports which were re-exported and to substitute an excise on those consumed in the country. He succeeded only in the case of tea, coffee, and chocolate which were kept in bonded warehouses and paid duty when released from them for home consumption. When he tried to extend the plan he failed. Had he succeeded the trade of London might have doubled, and the new method of collecting by excise instead of customs would have secured to the revenue the enormous sum lost by smuggling and enabled him to lighten the land tax. This latter he did actually reduce to 1s., while he lowered the rate of government loans from 8 and 6 to 4 per cent.

But the problem of the eighteenth century was where to find money for its wars. The increasing trade of the country helped, of course, by raising the value of the customs, and the land tax ranged from 1s. to 4s. according to need, but by 1763 men were seriously concerned at the near approach to the taxable limit that the nation would stand, and Grenville summed up the prevailing feeling when he defended a fresh tax by the pathetic demand to be told *where* he was to find a fresh source. That Pitt the elder was heard to hum the tune of a popular song beginning 'Gentle Shepherd, tell me where?' gave Grenville the nickname of 'Gentle Shepherd', but did not solve the problem. That was to be the work of Pitt's son, but meanwhile Grenville, in an evil hour, bethought him of the colonies and



plantations and so lost us the finest of them. It was mainly this difficulty of finding fresh sources of revenue that turned him to the American colonies for possible taxes and brought about the resulting 'Boston tea-party'.

The following table of the cost of the wars between 1688 and 1763 will give some measure of the difficulty. Nearly half of the cost was met by borrowing and the interest on the National Debt became a heavy item in the annual budget.

COST OF THE WARS, 1688-1763

<i>Date.</i>	<i>Cost.</i>	<i>Addition to National Debt.</i>
	£	£
1688-97 . . .	32,600,000	14½ million
1702-13 . . .	50,700,000	21½ "
1718-21 . . .	4,500,000	
1739-48 . . .	43,600,000	29 "
1756-63 . . .	82,600,000	59½ "

In 1755 the revenue was about 6½ millions, of which 80 per cent. was derived by indirect taxation from customs and excise. The following table shows how differently modern taxation is distributed :

	1755.	1914-15.
Total . . .	6½ millions	226 millions
Customs and Excise .	80 per cent. of total	43 per cent. of total
Land Tax . . .	14.6 "	3 "
Stamp Duties . . .	2 "	3½ "
Estate Duties, &c. .		14 "
Income Tax . . .		36 "

**Summary.** 1. During this period the landed aristocracy controlled the machinery of government. Their policy was one of protection for the agricultural interest, which they secured by a combination of bounties on exported and duties on imported produce, especially corn.

2. Commercially the policy was to do everything possible to weaken French trade, and to discourage all intercourse between the two nations. Apart from this political object, trade was viewed solely in its relation to our own industries; such as encouraged our own manufactures was facilitated, others dis-

countenanced or even prohibited. Bounties and high tariffs were the means employed.

3. The poverty problem had not been solved in the early seventeenth century, though it was now no longer an acute menace. A certain stiffening of the conditions of poor relief after 1723 reduced the rate, if not the poverty.

4. The old colonial system was based on the theory that the interests of the colonies must be entirely subordinated to those of England. This led to considerable friction with those overseas and to the ruin or prevention of Irish industry and prosperity.

5. The eighteenth century saw the growth of a National Debt and a system of government by credit. In taxation the burden passed from the landowner to the payer of indirect taxes. Excises were introduced, also Stamp Duties and a Hearth Tax that became a Window Tax. A property tax of 1s. came eventually to be levied on land only, but in 1755 only 14 per cent. of the total taxation was on land, the rest was all 'indirect', chiefly customs and excise. During a period of 75 years 40 years of war added 124 millions to our National Debt.

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